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ABSTRACT

This book presents a developmental model for peer helping which places less emphasis on students in crises and more emphasis on helping them in advance of serious problems. The first chapter introduces peer helping and the facilitative model and provides an overview of the book. The second chapter discusses principles of human behavior. The third chapter explores the concept of relating. Facilitative conditions of caring accepting understanding, trusting, and respecting are discussed. The fourth chapter focuses on listening skills. Four steps for attentive listening are outlined and discussed. The fifth chapter deals with responding. High facilitative responses, feeling-focused responses, clarifying and summarizing, open questions, acknowledging, linking, complimenting and confronting, reassuring and supporting, analyzing and interpreting, and advising and evaluating are all discussed. The sixth chapter focuses on giving feedback. The facilitative feedback model is presented, and guidelines are offered for giving feedback. The seventh chapter discusses decision making. Five focused questions are offered to help with making responsible and effective decisions. A problem-solving model is presented which encourages the use of high facilitative responses. The eighth chapter suggests helping projects for peer helpers such as helping interviews, peer support groups, planning leisure activities, peer tutoring, buddy systems, and large group presentations. (LLL)

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HELPING SKILLS

for Middle School Students

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by Robert D. Myrick, Ph.D. and Don L. Sorenson, Ph.D.

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Helping Skills for Middle School Students

by

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and

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and
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Teaching Helping Skills to Middle School Students (1992) by Robert D. Myrick and Don L. Sorenson is a program leader's guide and a companion to this book. Procedures for developing a peer helper program and for teaching students how to be facilitators are described. This book is also available from Educational Media Corporation®.

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Chapter 1

Peer Helping and the Facilitative Model

> "Make yourself a blessing to someone. Your kind smile or pat on the back just might pull someone back from the edge."
>
> *Carmelia Elliott*

As long as he could remember, Brent wanted to help others. He feels pain when others are hurting. He does what he can to reduce conflicts that arise around him. He is a good listener and others seek him out. They want to talk about fun things and their concerns. When Brent learned that his school counselor was starting a peer helping program, he was among the first to apply.

Congratulations! You have been selected to participate in this peer helper training program because you are a caring person. Peer helping is a process that involves caring persons. These caring persons help others to think about their ideas and feelings. They also help others to explore alternatives and to learn to make responsible decisions. When caring persons are trained for special roles, they might be called "peer helpers."

The terms "peer facilitator," "peer tutor," and "peer counselor" are sometimes used instead of "peer helper." The use of the word "peer" emphasizes that the helper is in the same general group as those being helped. The helper might be someone from the same neighborhood or school.

Peer helping has some basic ideas about human beings. There are some assumptions about the ways in which people meet the challenges of life. There is a set of interpersonal skills. These skills are used to support people who are trying to think matters through and to make decisions. Peer helping encourages individuals to set goals and to take more responsibility for their actions.

With the right kind of training, a peer helper can go beyond being a friend or a kind listener. Peer helpers can assist counselors and teachers to deliver more personal services than would otherwise be possible. There are not enough professionals to meet with all the people who need special attention and timely assistance.

Sometimes a brief meeting with a trained peer helper is all that is needed to support someone. Often, it is a simple matter of clarifying ideas or providing information. At other times, more help is required. Peer helpers recognize their limitations and responsibilities. They refer individuals to experienced professionals when it is appropriate. Successful programs provide training in interpersonal skills and careful supervision in helping projects.

The facilitative model, as described in this book, provides a framework of helping skills. These skills can be used with people of all ages and in many settings. The model can provide some direction in your work with others. It can give you the patience and confidence needed to be an effective helper. It is the heart of peer helping.

The facilitative model has been refined over the years. It is the result of many people who have studied the helping process. The characteristics of a helping relationship were first identified. Skills were also discovered. When these facilitative skills are used with people, a helping relationship results. After a helping relationship has been established, facilitative activities and strategies can be used. These activities and strategies help people to move toward their goals. When organized in a thoughtful way, high facilitative skills and procedures provide an easily managed approach to helping people. The following chapters are designed to help you learn more about the facilitative model and about peer helping.

Peer Helping: Common Sense or Learned Skill?

Many of the skills and concepts in this book may not be new to you. Some are common sense. Some may be familiar and some might seem to be techniques, rather than part of an artistic pattern. Being a facilitative person and peer helper can be viewed as part art and part science.

The artistic part of helping others refers to the innate aspects of the process. In the art of working with others, you develop a sixth sense about relationships and react spontaneously. Some helpers have a "gut level feeling" about situations and they trust their intuition to follow the flow of a conversation. This special instinct for helping has led some to say, "It's a natural process, if you care enough." They rely on the art of helping and their good judgment.

On the other hand, even the most sensitive and caring persons can become better helpers. The scientific information that has resulted from research and close observation can be useful. The helping process can be improved by using certain personal skills and methods. Yet, knowledge of them alone is not enough to make a positive difference.

Being a peer helper is not just knowing *what* techniques or skills to use. Peer helpers must also know *when* and *how* to use them. Some skeptics dislike the idea of using skills and techniques. They worry that selected words or methods imply that someone is being manipulated. Freedom and genuineness are lost. There is some truth to this idea, especially if skills are forced, or if the responses lack a sense of naturalness.

Yet, when facilitative skills are practiced and used logically, they can become a part of your natural style. When used appropriately, they can reflect your attitude of acceptance. Using facilitative skills shows respect, understanding, interest, and willingness to help. You can communicate more effectively.

Learning the Facilitative Model

The facilitative model is presented in this book. It consists of a few basic concepts, responses, and procedures. You can learn the facilitative model. Students in the fourth grade have learned the model and worked as peer facilitators and friendly helpers in their schools. Elderly citizens who wanted to help their less fortunate peers in convalescent homes have learned the model. After studying, you will see how you can use it in your life.

You may think that some people seem to be "naturals." They learn the model much faster than others. Or you may notice that these people need less coaching. They are just naturally kind, sensitive, and effective communicators. This is usually not the case. They probably learned their interpersonal skills by watching others and by experiencing these skills while growing up. Even these "natural helpers" can learn more about communication skills and helping relationships.

Learning facilitative skills is not much different from becoming highly skilled in a sport. When you first learned to swim, for example, it may have been helpful to know certain movements. These movements enable you to coordinate your arms, hands, legs, and the breathing process. Some people have been thrown into the water and told: "Sink or swim!" It is an unpleasant experience for most, although some have learned to swim that way. Throwing beginning swimmers into the water, without teaching them some basic skills, causes them to panic and struggle unnecessarily. If this happened to you, you might not want to get into the water next time. You might even avoid swimming altogether.

If you had your choice in learning how to swim, you probably would prefer to work closely with a coach. You would like someone who understands the sport of swimming. With the help of a coach, you could learn a few beginning skills. These skills would help you to survive in the water. You could enjoy swimming. Of course, there would still be difficult moments. Learning to swim does not come quickly to most people. It takes patience and practice. It takes experience. The coach's job is to break down the process, analyze it, and identify the most important steps. Your coach then selects those skills and techniques that you should work on first.

You will be coached through this book by a trainer. You will learn the art and science of being a peer helper—a facilitative person. There will be times when you will feel awkward and uncomfortable. You may wonder whether you are being phony. What you do at first may feel unnatural. Some skills are not a regular part of your daily life. They may not have been modeled for you. Remember, it takes patience and practice before many skills can be mastered. With time and practice, the skills can become a natural part of your work with others.

Overview of This Book

In this book the facilitative model is applied to peer helping. People learn and change. Helping relationships can be formed. Facilitative skills can help people think and make decisions. There are four parts to the model: 1) Relating, 2) Listening, 3) Responding, and 4) Decision making.

After first looking at some of the characteristics of helping relationships, you will think about what makes someone a good listener. All of us are selective listeners. How can you be a more attentive listener? Understanding what you are hearing is important if you are to help the talker. Knowing something about human behavior is also important.

Next, it is your time to talk. How do you respond to someone who has shared ideas and feelings with you? What do you say? There are many choices. Some are likely to be more facilitative than others and these might be viewed as skills. They can be clustered together and put in a framework for helping others. Decision making and problem solving are also part of peer helping. You will help others to resolve their problems and to take more responsibility for their lives.

Peer helping can be an exciting and valuable experience for you. This book can be a practical guide. It is not a final answer or a quick and easy solution. Rather, it is the beginning of a journey. You can learn to organize your thoughts, develop plans of action, and facilitate the helping process.

Activity 1.1

What's It All About?—Introductions

Purpose:

To clarify the purpose of the program and training procedures. To help students get acquainted by asking questions and making introductions to the group.

Materials:

None

Procedure:

1. Your trainer will tell your group about the program and get the group organized. Purpose, goals, meeting times, and general procedures will be explained and clarified.

2. As a get acquainted activity, students pair up, preferably with someone whom they know the least. They find a private place in the room to talk.

3. Students take turns asking any two questions they choose. The questions may be general or personal. The person being asked the questions has the "right to pass" on any question. Partners continue taking turns (asking two questions and answering two questions) until each has asked and answered 10 questions.

4. After all questions have been asked and answered, each person takes one minute to summarize what has been learned about his or her partner.

5. Next, partners take turns introducing each other to the rest of the group, until everyone in the group has been introduced.

6. Finally, a go-around procedure might be used in which each person is asked to name all the others in the group by first name.

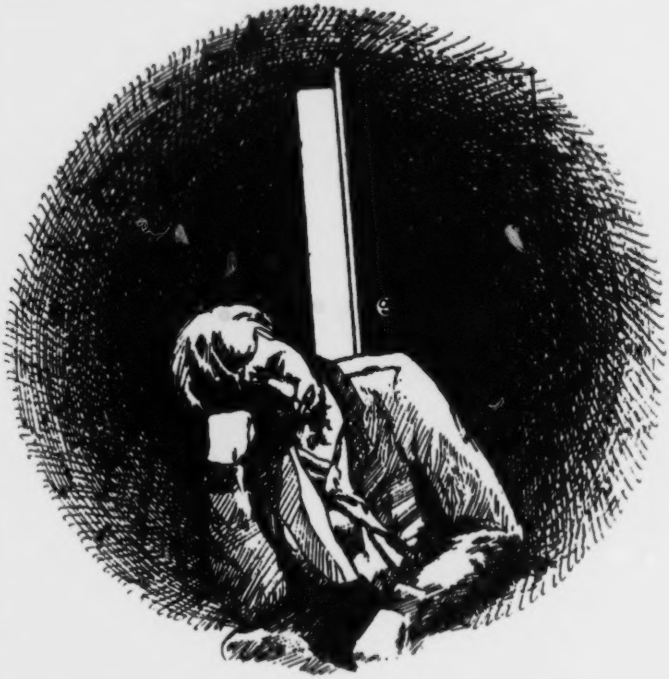
This activity can also be done by matching boys and girls. Look for opportunities to increase understanding and group cohesiveness. Although asking questions can be helpful, other things can be done to help a person talk about himself or herself.

Chapter 2

The Nature of People

"When you have to cope with a lot of problems, you're either going to sink or you're going to swim."

Tom Cruise



For many students, starting middle school is an exciting time. They have graduated from elementary school and they are looking forward to new experiences. This was not the case for Aaron. His older brother, Dwayne, would be an eighth grader this year. He was one of the "stars" of his class, a good athlete and student. Aaron enjoyed last year because he was not in the same school with Dwayne. He didn't have to follow his brother's footsteps. Now he would be back in the same school. He would have to "live up" to his brother's reputation.

The night before the fall semester began, Aaron opened the medicine cabinet in his parents' bathroom. He took a large handful of pills. He wanted to go to sleep and never wake up.

"Now, why did he do that?" "What made him behave that way?" Perhaps you have heard, or asked yourself, these kinds of questions when someone attracted your attention. You were curious about what the person was thinking or what led that person to behave in a certain way. Peer helpers frequently ask such questions of themselves when working with others. Trying to discover some of the answers is part of the fun. It is the challenge of peer helping.

You are not expected to understand others fully. You do not need to explain why people do what they do. Explaining human behavior is difficult. Even the most knowledgeable doctors, scientists, and teachers have trouble explaining people's behavior. There have been many books written about human behavior. They provide elaborate theories and detailed illustrations. Yet, these books often fall short. They fail to give us a complete explanation of what lies behind people's actions.

Understanding human behavior is not easy. However, there are beliefs about the nature of human behavior that can be useful. Some experts may argue that other factors, or different ones, must be considered. They might provide more detailed explanations, perhaps more than what is needed to help others. Other experts would agree with these few concepts.

Human behavior is extremely complex. We may never know in our lifetime all the principles that apply. In addition, we know that individuals are unique. An individual's experiences in life influence how he or she behaves. That complicates our general understanding. Still, there are some general guidelines which can help us understand more about the nature of human behavior. They can give us some direction in our work.

Principles of Human Behavior

The following eight principles of human behavior provide a foundation for peer helping. They may give you more insight, understanding, and patience. They also can be used as a starting place when planning for change in yourself and in others. Behind all the helping methods and strategies lie these basic premises.

1. We all have basic needs.
2. Everything we do is directed to goals.
3. Our self-concepts influence all our behaviors.
4. Our self-concepts are learned and can change.
5. Our self-concepts are influenced by the consequences of what we do.
6. We are always learning and changing.
7. Increased self-awareness leads to responsible decision making.
8. We learn from each other.

Let's look at these principles in greater detail.

Principle 1:
We all have basic needs.

To have a sense of well-being and to experience success, there are several basic needs that must be met. When these needs are not satisfied, we do not function well. When these needs are satisfied, our productivity, personal development, relationships with others, and general health are strengthened. Our most obvious needs are food, water, elimination, sleep, and shelter. These needs are necessary in daily living, but we often take them for granted. To these we might add the following, which also are essential.

The need to be loved and accepted. We all want to be accepted. While we are similar to others in many ways, still we feel unique. We want this uniqueness appreciated by others. It is both frustrating and disappointing when we are accepted only if we please others. There is a warmth and energy that comes to us when we experience unconditional love.

The need for security. We learn and function best in situations where we feel safe and free from threat. It is not fun, for example, to be in a group where we are afraid that what we say might be ridiculed. Some only feel secure if their work is mistake-proof. For fear of making a mistake, some people develop a shell around themselves. Very few people, and sometimes no one, are allowed to enter. Such a shell provides protection that gives a sense of comfort. Yet, it often prevents them from reaching out and enjoying new experiences. When they no longer need the shell and feel secure from threatening forces, there is a special joy in living.

The need to belong. There is in each of us a need to belong to some type of group. To be a part of a group gives us a sense of identity. It helps us feel accepted and often provides the type of support that is needed to help reduce anxiety. For example, there are some people who, upon arriving at school, immediately go to a favorite place to talk with their friends. They find security and a sense of identity by talking with the group. "Hey, what's happening?" is answered in a way that communicates understanding, a shared interest, and acceptance. People also seek membership in other groups, such as athletic teams, social clubs, and music groups. These groups also can provide a source of identity and a sense of belonging.

The need to be independent, to take responsibility, and to make choices. One of our needs is to feel in control of our lives. This emotional experience of feeling in charge—of being able to be ourselves and to not be a puppet on a string—is important. When this need is thwarted, we become devious, manipulative, self-sacrificing, and defensive.

Principle 2:
Everything we do is directed to goals.

We want to maintain and enhance our personal survival. Survival characterizes the essence of all living things. For instance, a plant will turn its leaves toward the sun. Its root system will grow toward water. This is much more clear when there is only a limited amount of water and sun available. Survival plays the central role in learning and behavior.

We spend most of our lives trying to increase our pleasure and reduce our discomfort. If this seems too simple, apply it to your own life. You do those things most often that bring you some type of pleasure or reward. You try to avoid pain, whether it is physical or psychological. You will protect your physical self and you frequently take precautions to avoid getting hurt. The same principle is also true of your psychological self.

Remember that we will change ourselves to help us survive physically. We will also change our behavior and make decisions that increase opportunities for the "psychological-self" to survive. We all hold certain attitudes, ideas, and perceptions about ourselves. These thoughts are organized and usually consistent. They persist over a long time and the term self-concept is applied to them.

Principle 3:
Our self-concepts influence all our behaviors.

You have some type of self-picture. This picture might be described as "I" or "me." It is this self-image or self-concept that determines your behavior. No other person will ever come to know you the way you know yourself.

It is through our self-concepts that we perceive the world. We feel..., we think..., and we act, based upon our perceptions.

Your self-concept can be composed of many forms: I am—your general nature; I can—your abilities; I should or should not—your beliefs and attitudes; I want to be—your aspirations and desires. You will behave in certain ways, depending upon how you see yourself. When you act in a way that is generally not your custom, then the experience is unpleasant. You may begin to feel defensive, inadequate, insecure, and even worthless.

Principle 4:

Our self-concepts are learned and can change.

Self-concepts are learned and can change. Change is usually slow, most often tedious, and sometimes painful. Once a self-concept becomes consistent, it is difficult to change. Change brings threat, anxiety, and fear of self-destruction. Yet, people can and do change. By using the facilitative model effectively, you can help people make positive changes.

Some experiences which affect the self-concept can be attributed to genetic and hereditary factors (e.g. physical size, color of skin, hair texture, and general physical features). We are also influenced by the culture or the environment in which we live. Two children growing up in two different parts of the world—or even in the same family—might behave differently. Their unique genetic make-ups, environments, and experiences influenced their development and belief systems. Each has a self-picture and behaves accordingly.

Principle 5:

Our self-concepts are influenced by the consequences of what we do.

Rewards and punishments play an important part in determining how consistent we behave and how we learn. We do those things that improve our self-images. For example, if talking tough and getting into fights is part of how a boy sees himself—*a la* Rambo style—then that will be a part of his behavior. Or if being a scholar and investigating certain scientific hypotheses—*a la* Dr. Salk—then he will spend a lot of time in research activities.

Much of what we do is shaped by our past and our immediate experiences. Perhaps nothing, however, influences the development of our self more than the consequences of our behavior. If the consequences are satisfying and rewarding, then those behaviors probably will occur again. A pattern or a habit may even be formed. On the other hand, if our behavior is ineffective and plays no part in meeting our basic needs, then it is likely to be disregarded. It will not become a part of our personal style.

Perception determines our reality and behavior. One of the interesting findings in the study of human behavior is that "reality" is influenced by self-concept. What is reality?

Suppose we were to show you a five-minute film. Then, we ask you and others in your group to describe what happened. You would soon realize that your perception, while similar in many ways, might be slightly different from the others. Such variances in perception, for example, have made it difficult for witnesses in a criminal case to provide accurate pictures of what happened. How we see things determines how we behave. The question is how do we see things?

Principle 6:
We are always learning and changing.

Learning is not limited to classrooms. Learning is going on continually in your life. When you are not reading this book, for example, you are still learning by watching, listening, talking with others, and interacting with your surroundings.

Learning is more than gathering and memorizing facts. It is more than learning information in a formal educational setting. It is the very act of living, surviving, producing.

We can see some very consistent patterns about our personality because some of our endearing patterns are formed before ten years of age. However, we are always in a state of change. We are always moving to something else. We can and do change, but change takes time. Although we want immediate changes, still change can be slow.

Principle 7:

Increased self-awareness leads to responsible decision making.

Through increased self-awareness, we can learn to resolve our problems. At a more conscious level, we can take more responsibility for solving them. If we have a sense of self-awareness, we have more understanding. The factors that influence us when we make a decision are more obvious..

If we lack this sense of self-awareness, we may catch ourselves alibiing or failing to take a stand. We may be unwilling to accept the consequences of our behavior. The responsibility for making choices and living with them rests with us, as individuals. We cannot live a life for another person.

Principle 8:
We learn from each other.

Most of our learning about life comes through interacting with others. It might be through direct personal contact or through reading what others are thinking. People provide us with rewards or punishments. They help us form relationships in our daily lives. They serve as models, whose behaviors we incorporate or reject. Without other people, learning is limited. It would be bland, narrow, and unimaginative.

We need to make an effort to understand others if we are going to help them. We can help them to become more responsible for themselves and to help them feel more adequate, worthy, and positive. This means that we must accept their attitudes as part of them. We need not agree with those attitudes or behaviors. It also means that if we are going to facilitate people to change, we cannot push our world onto them. It does not help to force them to agree with our perceptions and decisions.

Summary

The facilitative approach to helping puts a premium on understanding the nature of people. It helps us to appreciate the uniqueness of the individuals with whom we work. It emphasizes that change comes about best when others gain insight through their own experiences, rather than through our experiences. It means helping others to explore their worlds, so they might learn who they are. It means helping others to discover what they want out of life, and what they are trying to do to get it. It is this self-exploration that is central in the helping process.

Activity 2.1

Who Am I?

Purpose:

To promote exploration of who you are and what is important to you. To identify some cultural factors that have helped you to feel and believe as you do.

Materials:

Paper and pencil/pen.

Procedure:

1. Make a list of facts and information which are important to tell who you are. This may include some of the most "vital statistics" about you (e.g. birthrate, family).

2. Next, list information which tells something else about you as a person:
   a. 3 significant events in your life.
   b. 2 major beliefs or values you have about life.
   c. 3 things which have influenced who you are and what you believe to be true about life and others.
   d. 2 questions/concerns you have about life.
   e. 2 things you hope will happen in the future.

3. You might use the list to:

- Write a paper entitled: "Who I Am."

OR

- Share information with others in a small group, or triad. Everyone listens, asks questions, and shares information. Everyone takes a turn.

OR

- Make a collage, entitled "Who I Am," from pictures and headlines cut from newspapers and magazines. Show it to the class and tell what you were thinking and feeling as you put it together. Be prepared to answer a few questions from the group.

4. Reflect on the basic needs of people presented in chapter 2. What are the major needs or concerns of middle school students?

Activity 2.2

The Over-Night Express

Purpose:

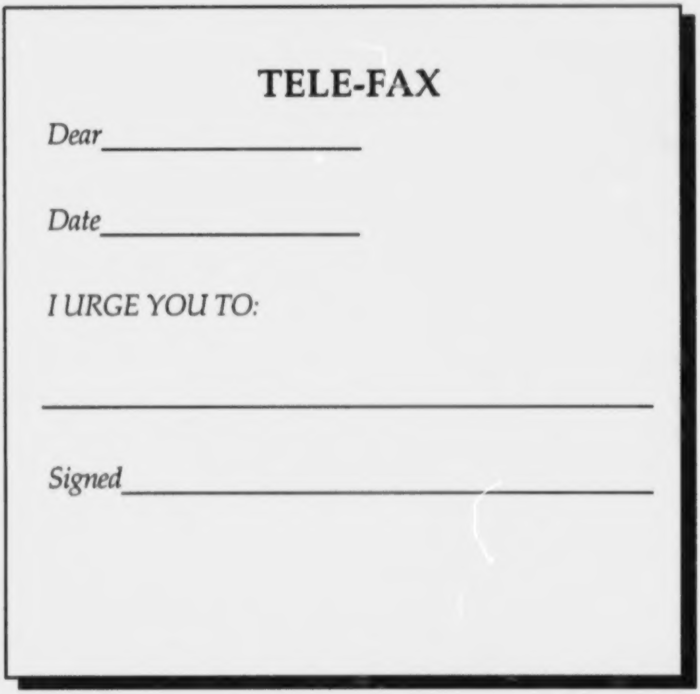
To take a stand on something that is important to you.

Materials:

A three-inch by five-inch index card or a tele-fax form, pencil/pen.

Procedure:

1. Design a tele-fax or overnight letter form using the model below:



TELE-FAX

*Dear*__________________

*Date*__________________

I URGE YOU TO:

____

*Signed*____________________________________

2. Complete the form using a real life situation which you feel is important.

3. Read the tele-fax in class.

4. Talk about what is needed before you could send the tele-fax or share your ideas with that person. What barriers get in the way? What factors encourage you to take a stand?

5. This time write another tele-fax, but address it to a middle school student. Choose a student that has the potential to make more positive contributions to the school and community than he or she is now doing.

6. Now write a final tele-fax. However, this one is addressed to yourself.

7. Pair up or participate in a group discussion and talk about the experience.

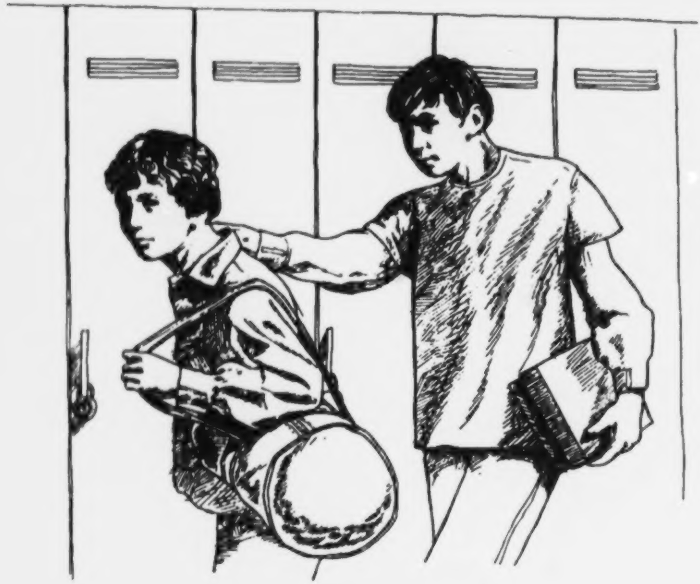
8. After the last person in the group has practiced giving feedback, discuss the experience in your group. There may be a need to answer questions or for clarification about what was said.

Chapter 3

Relating

"A true friend is someone who is there for you when he'd rather be anywhere else."

Len Wein



It started like any other Halloween. Some friends got together to go out and have a good time. Someone said, "Hey, let's trick or treat the neighborhood." The next morning it was all over school. Peter and Jeff had been arrested for breaking into an empty house and trashing it. They were suspended from school for three days and ordered to pay for the damage. Tomorrow would be their first day back in school. How should the students react to them? What do we say?

People need people who care about them. There are many articles and books that describe how people in our society feel alienated from one another. Some people might have a pool of acquaintances that ranges from 500 to 2,500 people. However, most people also have fewer than twenty friends to rely upon for close communication. The average American couple today has close friendships with about seven people. Although you may know someone with whom you would discuss personal matters, that person may not have facilitative skills.

People's relationships are filled with stress and strain. They are becoming shorter in duration. Many people are not able to develop good personal relationships and satisfy their basic needs. More and more, people are leading fragmented lives and having trouble communicating with others. All interpersonal relationships can be improved through communication and personal growth.

In our society there is a tendency for relationships to be too impersonal. They are often very centered on specific tasks. Studies of effective and ineffective teachers, for example, have shown that those who have a more personal relationship with their students tend to have a more positive impact. On the other hand, those teachers who take less of a personal interest, although they may be well-prepared academically, tend to be less effective.

The real heart of the helping process is the quality of the relationship. It doesn't matter how knowledgeable you may be of human behavior. Academic degrees, gender, age, and experience have less influence than the power of a warm and friendly relationship.

The ability to create a helping relationship does not belong exclusively to professionals, such as counselors, therapists, or doctors. Peer helpers can and do facilitate personal growth in others. What conditions are essential for a helping relationship?

The Facilitative Conditions

Think of a group in which you were a member. Think about a group leader who had a positive impact upon you. What words or phrases best describe that person? Now, think of a group where the leader was ineffective. What words or phrases best describe that person?

Persons who have positive influence are usually described as sensitive, understanding, and open. Ineffective leaders are often described as judgmental, unaccepting, sarcastic, cold, or distant. We also know that attitudes and behaviors are changed very little by advice, persuasion, or threats. People experience the most growth when they are with someone who is positive, accepting, tolerant, easy to talk with, and caring. If you want to be seen as a person who can be helpful, what do you need to do?

If you are seen as a friendly and caring person, then others are likely to be drawn to you. If they also see you as a person who is respectful, understanding, trustworthy, and interested in them, then they will tell you more about themselves. They will want to explore ideas and choices with you. A personal working relationship can be established.

We have selected five characteristics that can make you more facilitative. These are: 1) Caring, 2) Accepting, 3) Understanding, 4) Trusting, and 5) Respecting.

Caring

A peer helper must be caring. Caring is personal involvement. Involvement is further influenced by the degree to which you are committed to act in a helpful way. The full benefit of the facilitative process can take place only when people are committed to working together on something. This commitment might be on a class project, a team sport, or solving a problem.

Being personally involved and committed is a caring act. It does not mean that you must let others dominate your life. You do not have to sacrifice your own interests and goals. It does mean, however, that you care enough to give willingly. You plan to focus energy and time on someone else. Without caring on your part, the helping relationship lacks direction. It bogs down. Without caring you will experience boredom and fatigue. The facilitative process requires your commitment. Otherwise, it could easily drift and miss its mark.

As a peer helper, you must shift the focus away from your own needs and interests to those who you are helping. Self-centeredness is a powerful enemy to any facilitator. Being a peer helper requires a servant heart. You must genuinely care for those you want to help.

Accepting

Accepting is recognizing that others have a right to their feelings. You may not agree with or approve of their behaviors, but you can still accept the personal worth and dignity of a person. Being accepting of others means that you believe they are doing their best to get along in their lives. If they could do any better, they would. We must remember, however, that acceptance is not the same as approving of people's actions or agreeing with their ideas. It does not mean that you are encouraging them to continue doing what they have been doing.

Being an accepting person is not easy to do, especially when you see others as being very different from yourself. There is a natural tendency to reject or ignore those who are different. When the difference becomes clear, there is also a tendency to criticize, find fault, condemn, or belittle. Instead of curiosity and a desire to learn more about the person, we often become defensive. It is as though the person is threatening our own existence or meaning in life. Thus, our own self-concept and self-esteem influences how much we can accept others. Training in the facilitative skills can play an important part in being more accepting of others. Accepting leads to understanding, another critical condition in the helping process.

Understanding

What do caring helpers do as they listen to others tell about their interests, ideas, or problems? Attentive listening, of course, is essential. The best listeners selectively tune into what is being said. They note how it is said.

When you are understanding, you grasp what the person is talking about. More important, you also sense what the person is feeling and experiencing. You avoid labeling, judging, and evaluating. You are too busy "being with the person." You are trying to see from the other person's point of view. As some have suggested, you are trying to put yourself in the other person's shoes. However, understanding is more than that. You must guard against projecting your own feelings onto a situation. Do not assume you know what the person is feeling because that is what you would feel. When you are being understanding, you recognize and reflect the feelings, including the thoughts that others are experiencing.

Empathy is a word that is sometimes used as a substitute for the word understanding. It implies that you have heard the ideas expressed and the story that was told. It also implies that you can identify the feelings that were present. Tuning in to others' feelings and thoughts can bring about a closeness that lets you know them better.

When you are understanding, you are sensitive to a person's words and the feelings that go with those words. In everyday living, the pace is so fast that few people experience the joy of knowing that they have been understood. They assume others understand, but this may not be true. People are too often caught in their own thoughts and experiences. Self-centeredness is a part of life. Therefore, understanding others is a facilitative condition. It is part of becoming a peer helper.

As a peer helper, tune into others and try to understand their basic needs and interests. When they seek you out for help, try to be sensitive to what is going on behind the words. As you become more understanding, you can help people develop plans and personal goals.

Trusting

As people experience the conditions of caring, accepting, and understanding, they gain a sense of security and confidence. They can take more risks. They explore more ideas without fear of being judged or devalued. An openness is fostered that invites self-disclosure. They experience a sense of trust which adds energy to the helping process.

Being a trustworthy helper means that you will not use what you have learned about people to hurt them. You are concerned about their welfare. You act in their best interests. A trustworthy person is someone who can be trusted with ideas and feelings. However, there are occasions when you cannot remain confidential about matters. As a peer helper, you are neither granted privileged communication nor are you free from ethical responsibilities.

While you can respect someone's wishes for confidentiality, it is not something that peer helpers can promise without exceptions. There are limitations. For example, suppose someone were to talk about plans to injure someone else. It appears that this threat is real. It would then be your duty to inform a responsible adult who could provide more help. The key to being trustworthy is to be open and honest. You should also be respectful of a person's welfare.

People talk about matters openly with those they trust. As trust builds with a person or group, more information, ideas, and feelings are shared. The sharing expands the base upon which you interact and relate with others. There is an increased awareness of self and others. This can lead to effective decision making and problem solving.

There was a time when helpers were told that they should not reveal their own personal ideas, feelings, and values. In reality, everything you do while you are with others in some way reveals something about yourself. Your choice of words, for example, may suggest what you are feeling and thinking. Your dress, mannerisms, and posture are also revealing of what you value. They all make an impression on the person you are helping.

If you choose to tell something about yourself, perhaps something you experienced, you might cut across some of the differences between you. This might be particularly true as you work with others who have different backgrounds from your own. Sharing similar ideas and events in your life brings personal closeness. However, the most important element in self-disclosure is that of sharing feelings.

The appropriateness, timeliness, and extent of your own self-disclosures should depend on your purpose and your best judgment. Telling more about yourself can be helpful, as long as you are aware of your responsibilities, tasks, and goals. Before self-disclosing, you might ask yourself this question: Who is the person being helped and who is the helper?

Respecting

People who are respectful of others give them common courtesies. These courtesies include the right to express their own ideas and feelings, to be responsible for their own decisions, to solve their own problems, and to shape their own lives. Protecting someone's privacy and honoring the desire for some confidentiality is also an act of respect. Respect conveys a friendliness and warmth which is encouraging.

When people feel respected, they are more likely to share their ideas and to talk more openly about matters. They know that their contributions will be acknowledged. They know that they will not be "put down" for their efforts. Many people in society are treated as stereotypes, which ignores their individuality. Racist and sexist slurs show disregard for people. Likewise, peer helpers who gossip, who brag openly about their work, or who make negative comments about others do not show respect.

Summary

Building a close working relationship is the first consideration of any helping process. Some conditions are essential in a helping relationship: 1) Caring, 2) Accepting, 3) Understanding, 4) Trusting, and 5) Respecting. These characteristics emerge when facilitative skills are used.

Learning and applying the skills featured in the following chapters will reflect your caring, acceptance, understanding, trusting, and respect.

Activity 3.1

Who are the Helpers?

Purpose:

To study the helping or facilitative conditions: caring, acceptance, understanding, trustworthiness, and respect.

Materials:

Paper/pencil

Procedure:

1. If you were to describe a perfect friend, what words would you use? Make a list of the words.
2. Look at your list of words. Rank order the top three qualities.
3. In a triad or small group, take turns in a "go around." Tell what you would look for in a friend.
4. After everyone has had a turn, think of ways in which you can tell if a person is caring, friendly, trustworthy, understanding, respectful, accepting, and so on.
5. How are the characteristics of a perfect friend related to the characteristics of an effective peer helper? Does a peer helper have to be a best friend?
6. Discuss the following: Would a person of the same race or ethnic group, such as Hispanics, be more or less understanding of someone from the same group than someone who is not? How can you tell if someone is understanding?

What part does cultural heritage play in the helping process? If a person is not from the same cultural background, what can he or she do to show respect, understanding, caring, and the other helping conditions?

Activity 3.2

Problems of Middle School Youth

Purpose:

To consider major problems experienced by young people today, especially middle school youth.

Materials:

Pencil/pen.

Procedure:

1. Look at the ten problems confronting middle school students on the following page. Decide which three problems you think are the main concerns of middle school students today.

2. Next, mark a "1" in the blank next to the problem that you think is of greatest concern to youth who attend your school.

3. Continue to rank order the rest of the problems until you have ranked all ten.

4. Pair up with another person and compare the three major concerns you checked for middle school youth. Be sure to listen carefully to the explanations your partner gives for his or her checks and rankings.

Ten Problems Confronting Middle School Students Today

________*Academic Achievement in School*

________*Getting Along with Parents*

________*Sexual Attitudes and Behaviors*

________*Feelings of Loneliness*

________*Use of Illegal Drugs*

________*Use of Alcoholic Beverages*

________*Dealing With Limited English Proficiency*

________*Making Friends*

________*Working well With Teachers*

________*Negative Statements About Race, Culture, or Religion*

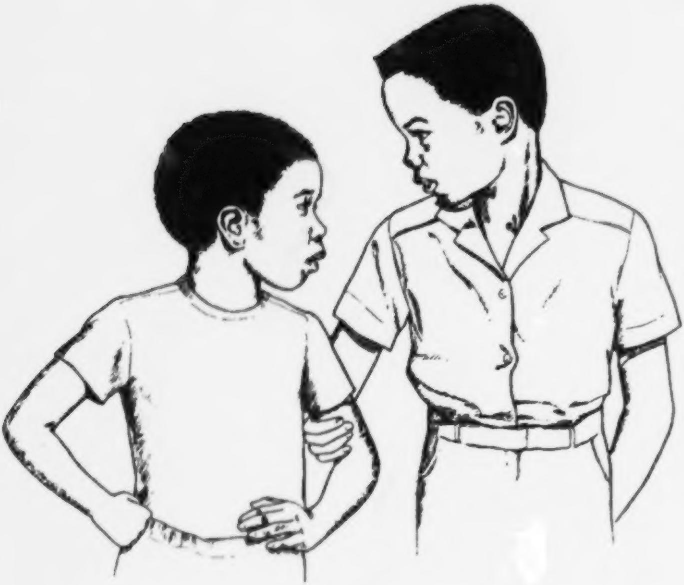
5. Look at the major problems that were checked. What other problems face young people?

6. Look at the problems again. Are the same concerns also true of special populations such as African-Americans? Asians? Hispanics? Other ethnic groups?

Chapter 4

Listening

"Listen to the sounds of silence."
Paul Simon



It had been a tough summer for Jeremy. His mother was very sick and he had to stay home to take care of his little brother and sister. He got along okay with his sister, but his brother was a real pain. His brother, Michael, was only two years younger. He didn't like taking orders from Jeremy. He rebelled at everything. Jeremy thought, "There must be some way I can get him to listen to me."

Listening seems easy enough to do. Most of us listen to television, radio, teachers, parents, friends, and various noises every day. You might be thinking, "I've been a listener all my life. I know how to listen. I need help getting others to listen to me."

Think about the different conversations that you have had today. While you were talking, how many people do you think really heard what you were saying? How many were sincerely interested in trying to communicate with you? What would they say if they tried to tell others about your conversation with them? How would they describe your feelings? Did they hear you, or did they hear only what they wanted to hear?

Seldom do we get an opportunity to talk with people who take time to listen to us. We don't often talk with people who follow our ideas and who encourage us to talk in greater depth. Most people are trapped in their own thoughts. They are worried about the impression they are making. They are too busy with their own thoughts to be effective listeners. Or if they try to listen, they sometimes lack the patience to hear us out. They interrupt and interject their own ideas. They shift the focus of the conversation, either consciously or unconsciously, to themselves and we are not encouraged to talk about our ideas. Conversations are often shallow or of little interest. Sometimes the social game is more important than having a meaningful discussion.

If you are a careful and attentive listener, you will avoid jumping in or interrupting. Do not take the focus away from what is being said. You will avoid being preoccupied or expecting what might be said. Rather than letting your mind wander, focus on the talker's thoughts and feelings.

Good listening is not a passive act. You do not sit back and relax, quietly waiting your turn. To the contrary, good listening is an active process where you are working at understanding what the person is saying. Skilled listeners do not let their own needs, values, and beliefs interfere. They restrict their needs and remarks, to give others a chance to share their thoughts. They patiently encourage others to tell their stories in their own ways.

Following the lead of the talker requires practice. You listen to the words. You focus on what is being communicated through posture, gestures, facial expressions, and other physical behavior that go with the words. You see body language and take it into consideration, along with the words that were spoken. You might ask yourself: "What is the message here? What is the person really saying? How was the person feeling then? How is the person feeling here and now?"

When was the last time you took stock of your own listening habits? Do you get involved in a conversation, encouraging others to express themselves? Do you find others boring? Do other people, after having talked with you, leave thinking that you have listened to them? Do they believe that you cared about what they had to say? Do they leave feeling understood?

Peer helpers need to be good listeners. When you take time to listen to someone—really listen to someone—it is one of the most caring things you can do. If you can help people feel that their ideas are important and that you are interested, then you can provide a meaningful experience. You add to others' personal worth and sense of well-being.

Four Steps for Attentive Listening

How can you become a better listener? A few simple steps that can make a difference in peer helping are:

1. Look at the person who is talking.
2. Pay attention to the words.
3. Be aware of the feelings that go with the words.
4. Say something to show that you are listening.

Let's take a closer look at these steps.

1. Look at the person who is talking.

A comfortable and relaxed position or posture invites people to talk. You also should maintain eye contact while listening to them. Listening and understanding is much easier if you look directly at the person. Put yourself in a position where you can see the person's face. Take notice of gestures and non-verbal communication. You can use your eyes—and your ears—to learn.

Your own eyes communicate a lot to people. They emphasize how interested you are in them. They reflect your reactions. They give them clues about what you are thinking and feeling. In brief, your eyes not only say that you are attending to the person, but they communicate a lot about you.

2. Pay attention to the words.

As you listen to a person talk, many ideas might come to mind. Try to avoid drifting off into your own thoughts, or daydreaming. This is a common problem for many helpers. Try not to anticipate what will be said or reach premature conclusions. Take a close look at yourself to see if you have any irritating habits. Do you finish people's sentences or fill in words for them when they hesitate? Have some patience and give people time to tell you what they are thinking. Let them be the center of attention.

As people speak, listen to the words they use that convey ideas or describe events. A story being shared is a personal perspective of an idea or event. As you attend to the person, you might listen for some common themes or ideas. You might take note of key words which capture what is being said. When the person is finished talking, you should be able to summarize the main ideas. The person who was talking might say, "Yes, that's what I was trying to say!" or, "No, that's not it." Then you have to hear the story again, if the person has the patience to tell you.

3. Be aware of the feelings that go with the words.

All people have feelings when they express themselves. Ideas are always complimented by feelings, either pleasant or unpleasant.

Beginning helpers often hear only the spoken words and miss the feelings that are also communicated. Feelings are a natural part of people's lives and should not be ignored. To the contrary, feelings are so important that peer helpers need to listen for them.

Some feelings may be easily identified because they were referred to when the story was being told. Other feelings are found behind the words. They may be a driving force or an emotional expression that completes the thoughts and ideas. If you want to be a careful and attentive listener, then you have to tune into feelings.

A practical way to be aware of feelings is to ask, "Am I hearing pleasant or unpleasant feelings? Or am I hearing both kinds of feelings?" This little technique will slow you down. It helps you to focus your attention on what the person is experiencing. It also gives you a hint as to how you might respond.

A list of common pleasant and unpleasant feelings follow. Examine the list and become familiar with them. What other words would you add? Which ones seem strange to you?

Unpleasant Feelings Words

Abandoned
Agony
Ambivalent
Angry
Annoyed
Anxious
Betrayed
Bitter
Bored
Burdened
Cheated
Cold
Condemned
Confused
Crushed
Defeated
Despair
Destructive
Different
Diminished
Discontented
Distracted
Distraught
Disturbed
Dominated
Divided
Dubious
Empty
Envious
Exasperated
Exhausted
Fatigued
Fearful
Flustered
Foolish
Frantic
Frustrated
Frightened
Grief
Guilty
Intimidated
Irritated
Isolated
Jealous
Left Out
Lonely
Longing
Low
Mad
Maudlin
Mean
Melancholy
Miserable
Nervous
Odd
Overwhelmed
Pain
Panicked
Persecuted
Petrified
Pity
Pressured
Quarrelsome
Rejected
Remorse
Restless
Sad
Scared
Shocked
Skeptical
Sorrowful
Startled
Strained
Stupid
Stunned
Tenuous
Tense
Threatened
Tired
Trapped
Troubled
Uneasy
Unsettled
Vulnerable
Weak
Weepy
Worried

Pleasant Feeling Words

Adequate
Affectionate
Befriended
Bold
Calm
Capable
Caring
Challenged
Charmed
Cheerful
Clever
Comforting
Confident
Content
Delighted
Determined
Eager
Ecstatic
Enchanted
Enhanced
Energetic
Enervated
Enjoyed
Excited
Fascinated
Fearless
Free
Fulfilled
Generous
Glad
Gratified
Groovy
Happy
Helpful
High
Honored
Important
Impressed
Infatuated
Inspired
Joyful
Kind
Loving
Loved
Peaceful
Pleasant
Pleased
Proud
Refreshed
Relaxed
Relieved
Rewarded
Safe
Satisfied
Secure
Settled
Sure
Warm

If it helps, think of different situations in your everyday life. Try to imagine the feelings that could be present. For instance, suppose that someone noticed that your bicycle had a flat tire and told you about it. Or imagine that you received a critical note from someone and it wasn't signed. What if you worked on a class project for several hours more than you expected and were still not finished? How might you feel in these situations?

Next, you might think of situations in which you will be a peer helper. What are some typical kinds of feelings that might be present, both pleasant and unpleasant?

It is important to know more about pleasant and unpleasant feeling words. Expanding your vocabulary helps you to be more sensitive and responsive. Effective facilitators and helpers use feeling words. In addition, they know that feelings and behaviors are closely related. People behave, for better or for worse, out of their feelings. Ironically, the way people act also influences their feelings. It is an endless circle of one affecting the other.

4. Say something to show that you are listening.

The person whom you are helping will not know that you are listening unless you say something to show it. It is not enough to say, "I know what you mean." Or, "I know how you feel." These general statements might be comforting to a few, but most people want more evidence that you really heard them. This is where facilitative helpers make a difference.

Careful and attentive listeners have something to say when it is their turn to talk. First, they do not change the subject, unless it is important to redirect or refocus the topic. Second, they periodically check out what they think they are hearing. They interrupt if it is necessary to confirm that they are tuning in to thoughts and feelings. They make a conscious effort to let the other person know that they are listening. It is important to listen to both the story or content (facts, events, ideas, or general story) and to the feelings (pleasant, unpleasant, or both) that go with the content .

Look at the example below.

Jerry:

I know that the tryouts for the soccer team will be tomorrow, but I'm not sure I should go. I'll probably never make the team anyway.

Peer Helper:

You like the idea of playing soccer, but are unsure if you want to go to the tryouts.

Jerry:

Yeah, I keep giving myself little pep talks, but I know I'll panic and screw up when I get there.

Peer Helper:

You want to tryout, but are afraid that you'll embarrass yourself. You seem to be in a bind.

Jerry:

I'm not really sure it's worth it. But, then again, I know that I'm better than some guys.

Peer Helper:

How would you compare yourself to some of the others who will be trying out?

In this example, the peer helper used short empathic responses to emphasize Jerry's feelings. It appeared that his unpleasant feelings were overpowering any pleasant feelings he may have for the soccer team tryouts. His unpleasant feelings were upper most in his thoughts. Therefore, good listening required the peer helper to focus on those unpleasant feelings. Later, the peer helper could encourage Jerry to explore his other thoughts and feelings.

It is always refreshing to find someone who not only hears our story, but who attends to what we are experiencing. It is nice to have someone respond to our feelings. When you respond to feelings and ideas, you emphasize that you are understanding. You also engage the other person in a facilitative process where more awareness can occur, decisions and alternatives can be considered, and actions planned.

Summary

People seldom get an opportunity to talk with someone who will take time to listen. People need people who will follow their ideas, and who will encourage them to talk in greater depth. Effective peer helpers follow four simple steps:

1) look at the person who is talking; 2) pay attention to the words; 3) be aware of the feelings that go with the words; and 4) say something to show that you are listening. Using these steps will improve your listening skills. This type of listening is part of the facilitative process and it is a major task of peer helpers.

Activity 4.1

Listening for Feelings

Purpose:

To learn a procedure for understanding what others are experiencing by listening for pleasant or unpleasant feelings.

Materials:

Paper/pencil and, perhaps, a list of feeling words

Procedure:

Read the following: "It is important to know what people are experiencing or feeling. This gives us an opportunity to communicate understanding and caring. One way to do this is to think of feelings as being pleasant or unpleasant. A person may be experiencing both kinds of feelings, or mixed feelings." Let's try an exercise:

1. Think about a pleasant experience that you have had recently. Now, write down as many feeling words as you can that describe that experience.

2. Think back to an unpleasant experience that you have had recently. Write down the feeling words that come to mind as you think about that event.

3. Now, write as many feeling words as you can that describe how you are feeling right now.

4. Using your lists, work with other class members to make a chart showing two lists of feeling words: PLEASANT/ UNPLEASANT that were identified or used in this activity.

5. As you look at the chart, how are the feeling words related to what people say and do (behave)? Do feelings cause people to act certain ways? Do behaviors cause people to feel a certain way? Is it possible to have both pleasant and unpleasant feelings in a situation?

6. Look at your own feeling word lists. What words could be added to describe what you were experiencing? What feeling words did you list which do not appear in the printed lists?

7. How important is it to have a feeling word vocabulary in order to be a peer helper?

Activity 4.2

How I See the World

Purpose:

To share ideas about the world and practice listening for pleasant and unpleasant feelings.

Materials:

A large piece of paper that can first be cut into a circle and then into parts; pencils, markers or crayons.

Procedure:

1. Form a group with three or four other members of the class.
2. The large piece of paper represents the world. Cut the paper into parts. Each person is given a part of the "world."
3. All participants draw some symbols or pictures in their own part of the circle. These drawings should represent some of their thoughts and feelings about how they see the world today.
4. After the group has recorded their thoughts, group members take turns telling others the meaning of their pictures.
5. While each person is talking, group members listen for unpleasant and pleasant feelings.
6. After everyone has finished, the group tries to remember the feelings that were shared. A list of these feeling words is made.
7. After everyone has had a turn, look at the total list of pleasant and unpleasant words. Discuss your reactions.

Chapter 5

Responding

"I never learned anything talking. I only learn things when I ask questions."
Lou Holtz

This was a new experience for Felicia. Most of the time when she talked with other people, she felt they weren't really hearing what she had to say. They just waited for her to finish talking, and then they started talking about themselves. This person was different. She called herself a peer helper. She was actually listening. She summarized ideas. Even more amazing, this peer helper identified the feelings *that Felicia was experiencing. It was great!*

There is no doubt that your careful observation and listening are needed in peer helping. However, now it is your turn to say something to show that you have been listening. What will you say? The answer to that question will depend upon what you hear and see as you help an individual in need.

Certainly non-verbal behavior plays a role in what others communicate. However, most of the time we respond to what people say to us. Our words reflect attitudes and feelings as much as they convey our ideas. A few carefully chosen words can communicate an invitation to talk more, to explore, and to discover. Ill-chosen words tend to push people away, threaten relationships, and impede learning. Peer helpers know how to respond to others in a facilitative way.

Peer helpers are aware that their choice of words can make significant differences in helping relationships. There are no set speeches to give. There are no words of wisdom or specific statements to offer. After careful and attentive listening, peer helpers try to use facilitative responses.

The facilitative model has been referred to and described in other books (e.g. Myrick and Folk, 1991). This model can provide you with some guidelines. It is a practical approach to responding to others in helping relationships.

There are six high facilitative responses that you will want to use frequently in your work. There are other responses which may be helpful occasionally, but they are considered low facilitative.

High Facilitative Responses

There are many things you can say. Some responses, however, are more facilitative than others. A few have been identified as high facilitative. They communicate understanding and respect. They show caring, acceptance, and they establish lines of openness and trust. They help foster the conditions most desired in a helping relationship. They encourage people to become more aware of themselves and others.

The high facilitative responses are essential in peer helping. They are:

1. Feeling-focused responses
2. Clarifying and summarizing
3. Open questions
4. Acknowledging
5. Linking
6. Complimenting and confronting

Feeling-focused responses

The *feeling-focused response* requires you to be sensitive to the person's feelings. You say something that focuses on a feeling, pleasant or unpleasant, that you heard. You need not respond to all the feelings that were expressed. However, a feeling word which captures part of what the person was experiencing must be included to get credit for this type of response. It is the premiere response for communicating understanding.

The feeling-focused response is one of the highest facilitative responses that you can make to others. Yet, it is seldom used in everyday conversation. Studies show that less than one out of a thousand times will a feeling response be made to a person's statement. This is also true in many helping professions, such as nursing, teaching, or social work. In the general scheme of life, feeling-focused responses are uncommon. Many people, therefore, complain that nobody understands them. They feel lonely and even alienated. Some, in defense of themselves, become skeptics. They take on negative attitudes about others. This results in unsatisfying relationships.

Listen carefully for feelings and respond to them and people will perceive you as someone who cares about them. They will know that you are interested in what they are experiencing. They will feel more comfortable and relaxed with you. They will trust you more and they will begin to see you as someone who can help them.

Here are a few examples of feeling-focused responses:

"You're really angry, John. You are not sure what to do next."

"Rachel, you appear to be confused."

"That was exciting for you."

"You're feeling more relaxed now."

"It still hurts to think about it."

Some writers have described this type of response as "reflecting understanding." There is a feeling of being understood when someone else responds to your feelings. When you echo someone else's feelings, which may or may not be expressed openly, you are following the person's lead. In this way you enter that person's world.

The disclosure of a person's feelings has not always been viewed as facilitative. For many years in our society, feelings were considered to be private matters. They were to be guarded. Some people still think that their feelings should not be shared or discussed. They may try to deny them for fear that some of their feelings would reveal a weak character or a personality problem. Such a position makes it difficult to form close personal relationships.

Without a focus on feelings, communication is too formal, restricted, stiff, and impersonal. Many of the problems in society are due to a lack of understanding. We lack the ability to express our feelings which are related to our behavior. Sometimes, repressing feelings or failing to talk about feelings are steps toward personal dysfunctioning and unproductive relationships.

For some people, the feeling-focused response may be difficult to learn. The response involves more than a restatement of words or paraphrasing. It is not to be confused with clarifying or summarizing ideas or events. Nor is the response to be confused with an interpretation, which attempts an explanation of what is causing a feeling or action. Rather, feeling-focused responses emphasize what the person is experiencing.

The focus is on pleasant, unpleasant, or both kinds of feelings. One or more of these feelings may have been stated in the person's words to you. Other feelings may be present, but they were not expressed openly. Your task is to identify and respond to them, communicating your sincere interest to understand.

You may have heard the question: "Can you put yourself in their shoes?" This adage suggests that by doing so you will know what they are experiencing—feeling. Another question that sometimes is posed is, "How would you feel if you did or said something like that?" Sometimes the answers can give you a clue to understanding, but they can also lead you astray. Be aware that the answers you provide might be a projection of your own feelings and may be unrelated to their feelings. We often assume others experience the same things we do in similar situations, when this may not be true.

Moreover, it is not enough to identify feelings if you say nothing to show your understanding. To say simply, "I know what you feel," or "I understand what you are going through," are not feeling-focused responses. Neither of these statements communicate understanding. They might be perceived as reassurance, perhaps providing some comfort. However, without a focus on feeling words to emphasize your understanding, they will probably miss the mark. They could even be seen as shallow, condescending remarks.

To begin a sentence with "I feel" or "You feel" does not always mean that you will focus on a person's feelings. For instance, "I feel you'd make a good president of the group" is not a feeling-focused response. It is an opinion. It might be restated, "You seem uncertain and wonder if you would make a good president of the group." This gives attention to what the person is thinking and experiencing. The first part focuses on the feeling and the second part focuses on the idea or topic. To receive any credit for a feeling-focused response, feeling words (pleasant or unpleasant) must be in your response.

Feeling-focused responses both communicate understanding and help create the facilitative conditions. They have a lot of personal power. There is no need to follow immediately with another statement. In peer helping, let the impact of focusing on feelings stand alone. Pause. Give the person an opportunity to reflect on your statement. If you are accurate, the person will usually nod positively and continue to talk. The moment of understanding is often a bonding one and a pleasant experience for both of you.

In addition to the cues you receive from what people say, you should also tune in to their feelings. Observe their non-verbal and extra-verbal behavior. It is always taking place between people. Such communication comes through tone of voice, the speed of speech, pauses, and hesitations. It includes stammering, stuttering, and stumbling, as well as exaggerated emphasis on words or facial expressions. Gestures and other body movements also convey meaning. A turn of the lip, a frown, a rolling of eyes, or a tapping of fingers can provide clues about what a person is thinking and feeling.

Body language has been a subject of study for many years. However, there is no reliable reference book that analyzes or explains this type of language. Therefore, interpreting non-verbal behavior should be done with caution, if at all. It is too easy to be misled by dress, postures, and other appearances. No doubt they are a part of the person's total experience, perhaps what the person is thinking or feeling. If something is taken out of context or isolated as a symbol of what a person believes and thinks, it may be inadequate and irrelevant.

If you are looking for a key to being a more effective helper, begin by increasing your feeling word vocabulary. This enables you to be more sensitive and to respond more accurately to what people say and do. Be as precise as you can, choosing the best word to reflect the person's feeling.

There are many feeling words that are closely related. Sometimes you might choose one that captures a shade of the basic emotion (e.g. "You're annoyed," instead of "You're mad.") It acknowledges the unpleasant experience and it may not evoke as much defensiveness as words which are less socially accepted. If you are wrong, or if people want to use even stronger words to emphasize their emotions, they can substitute or add another word.

Making a feeling-focused response, even when it is not exactly on target, will get you credit for being a caring person. You are trying. Most people appreciate the effort. You can always be corrected. Meanwhile, your attempt emphasizes how much you want to understand. You can hardly lose when you make feeling-focused responses. Even when corrected, if not accurate, your effort puts you in closer communication with the other person. Your understanding is enhanced.

It is possible that your focus on a feeling could be rejected or denied, even though you believe you are accurate. Sometimes responding accurately to feelings can be a little threatening. Some people, for instance, become uneasy when they realize that they are revealing so much of themselves. This is especially true when they are insecure, cautious, and doubtful of others.

Helping others to develop feeling word vocabularies is as important as teaching them some decision-making and problem-solving strategies. Individuals cannot talk or behave without showing feeling. Both their verbal and non-verbal behaviors reveal these feelings. Many people are unaware of their feelings or have ignored or suppressed them. "Don't get emotional" is an expression that many of us have heard, especially when trying to make a decision or to solve a problem. The assumption is that logical and clear-headed thinking is without personal feelings. This is nonsense.

Feelings have a powerful influence on behavior. Feelings are a part of living. Yet, we all know people who are so unresponsive to their environment that the scope of their feelings is limited. These unfeeling people are very dysfunctioning. If a person is without feeling, more extensive and professional help is probably needed. The person should be referred to a counselor or mental health professional.

People experience many kinds of feelings during a day. They take some routine events in stride, while others are unsettling. There is a very low level of awareness of feelings, as thoughts and images seem to take priority in most situations. Responding to feelings increases awareness, which is related to responsible decision making and problem solving.

Clarifying or summarizing responses

If you are like most listeners, when a person is talking you attend to the events or the ideas. They are the basis of the conversation and provide the framework for a discussion. Although emotion is being expressed, the thoughts and the story must also be understood. After listening, you may want to respond by clarifying a significant theme or summarizing a few ideas. For instance:

> *"You have already decided what you are going to do Friday night."*
>
> *"Let's see then, you plan to take Spanish next year."*
>
> *"You and your parents seem to disagree about how to spend the summer."*

Clarifying or summarizing responses focus on basic ideas or events. When so much is being said in a free-flowing conversation, many ideas are communicated. One statement might express a key idea, such as plans to get better grades in school, while other statements support the idea. Sometimes the person who is talking will veer off course, talking about something else. That person may introduce more key thoughts, which may or may not be relevant to the first idea expressed. Being an attentive listener is not an easy job, especially when a person is rambling.

There are several times when it can be helpful to make a clarifying or summarizing response. You might clarify when you are not sure if you are following the person's train of thought. This response is also used when you are not sure if you heard something correctly. If you want to draw attention or emphasize something that was said, clarify or summarize what you heard. Such responses focus on the content of the discussion or the events of the story. There is no attempt to use feeling words, although feelings may have been heard when the ideas were expressed.

As you try to focus the conversation or highlight ideas, use fresh words when you clarify or summarize. This avoids parroting. You can use some of the same words. Turn the words and phrases around, unless you deliberately want to repeat the phrasing for emphasis. Some people have referred to this type of statement as paraphrasing. It is rewording a written or spoken message.

When used at appropriate moments, clarifying or summarizing responses communicate that you are interested in the thoughts that are expressed. You want to know more. These responses also give people an opportunity to hear their ideas. They can think more about what they have said. In a sense, the responses focus the discussion, almost serving as a checklist of ideas that are receiving attention.

If you have misunderstood, the person to whom you are talking can correct you. That person can also add information that could increase your knowledge. Then, you are back on track. You can again follow the lead of the person as the story continues.

Unfortunately, the clarifying and summarizing responses have been spoofed by a few people who think that they lack genuineness. People might think that you are using a phony technique by mirroring back ideas, especially when they hear some typical lead in phrases such as:

"If I hear you correctly...."

"You seem to be saying...."

"If I am following you, you are saying...."

"In other words, you are trying to...."

"Correct me if I'm wrong, but you're saying...."

"I heard these key ideas, 1)...."

"Let me see if I understand, you said...."

"What is emerging from all that you said is...."

"Let's see, you are thinking that...."

There is nothing wrong with such introductory phrases. In fact, they can be useful. They alert the person on whom you are trying to focus the conversation. They also provide a little "wiggle room." These phrases provide simple qualifications of what you are planning to clarify or summarize. Moreover, they can provide a lead-in for you as you express your own thoughts.

Suppose that someone came to you and began talking about a test that was to be given soon. You might respond to the person's feelings (e.g. "You're worried about the exam"; "It makes you uneasy and nervous to think about it.") You might clarify or summarize (e.g. "This exam is coming up soon"; "You're planning to spend tonight studying for the exam.") In both cases, you follow the lead of the individual, rather than give advice or reassuring remarks. This facilitates more communication.

Open questions

Questions are designed to get additional information, provoke thought, or encourage discussion. They imply that it would be helpful to discuss the situation in more detail. They also focus the discussion. Questions determine the type of information collected. As importantly, they can determine the direction of a relationship.

Let's suppose you want to talk to someone about a problem. If you start the discussion through a lot of questions, you might be seen as a person with some answers. Why did you ask your questions? Did you hope they would help the person gain insight? Or did you really plan to provide a solution?

Questions can stimulate discussion. But, there are certain things that should be kept in mind when posing them:

1. What is the purpose of the question and what is the assumption behind it?
2. Are you trying to get more information or to encourage the person to elaborate?
3. Is there an alternative response that could be more effective?
4. What impact is the question going to have on the relationship?

Let's take a look at some questions.

Questions can be either *open* or *closed*. *Closed* questions require only simple yes or no responses. They are often experienced as a "just give me the facts" approach. On the other hand, *open* questions ask for more information and encourage answers with more explanation. Look at these examples:

"Do you get along with your parents?" (closed)

"What can you tell me about your parents?" (open)

"Did you talk with your mom?" (closed)

"What did you say to your mom?" (open)

The open question provides a broad base from which to respond. There is some leeway. How the person responds may provide valuable information. The closed question is narrow and interested in facts. Closed questions also tend to be couched in terms of your own perspective and interests. Open questions elicit the points of view of others.

In these examples, which do you find more inviting?

"You don't like living here, do you?" (closed)

"What do you dislike about living here?" (open)

"Is this assignment confusing to you?" (closed)

"What is it that's confusing to you?" (open)

"Are you going to go to the concert this weekend?" (closed)

"What do you think about going to the concert this weekend? (open)

Open questions are more facilitative because they invite additional self-disclosure. They encourage people to express themselves more. Closed questions, however, also have their value. They are especially useful when you are trying to get some specific information or confirm some thoughts or facts. There will be times when you can speed up information gathering by using closed questions, if that is what you want to accomplish.

The most facilitative open questions begin with "What" or "How" instead of "Why." The latter is risky since it asks people to explain or justify themselves. The infamous "why" question deserves special attention.

Most people do not know the reasons they do what they do. Yet, they might be asked, "Why did you do that?" Many people respond to such a question with a quick, "I don't know." They look away or shrug their shoulders. They feel on the spot. Look at these questions:

"Why don't you put in more time?"

"Why did you talk to him like that?"

"Why are you always late for school?"

"Why do you play your radio so loud?"

"Why didn't you talk with your dad?"

How would you feel if such questions were directed to you? What kinds of answers are possible? What impact do you think these questions might make on others?

We may never discover or understand all the reasons we do the things we do. A rational explanation of some things seems impossible. In addition, the "why" question has also come to mean something else besides a question. It is often an opinion. Look again at the preceding examples. Behind each of the questions is advice: put in more time; do not talk that way; be on time for school; turn down the radio; or talk with your dad.

When people hear the "why" in a question, they might also hear criticism. They could become defensive, even when it is an honest question of interest or concern. Therefore, peer helpers limit their use of the "why" question. They know that it is not as productive as turning it into a "what" or "how" question.

For example:

"Why didn't you come to school yesterday?"

"What made you miss school yesterday?"

"Why don't you work harder?"

"What keeps you from working harder?"

"Why don't you like your teacher?"

"How would you describe your teacher?"

The what and how questions are more specific. They are easier to answer. The why questions, although they may produce some insightful thought and comments, are usually less productive. They tend to elicit rationalizations and defensive postures.

Clearly the wording of a question—the way in which it is phrased or posed—can make a difference in the response that is received. Your tone of voice can also make a difference. A question is a response to someone. It also communicates your values and interests.

Finally, most people say that others ask too many questions of them. Out of habit and social custom, more than anything else, it is easy to ask questions. We hear and use them more than other kinds of responses. It is also easy to fall into the trap of asking questions without listening to the answers.

Behind every question is an assumption. Therefore, questions can easily be turned into statements which tend to be either feeling-focused or clarifying responses. For example:

Open Question:

"What feelings do you have about this class?"

Statements:

"This class is on your mind a lot these days."

"You worry about this class."

Turn questions into statements to reduce the number of questions you pose. Subsequently, you increase your number of high facilitative responses. This can be especially helpful if you find yourself asking a lot of questions. It is also effective to ask an open question and follow it with a feeling-focused or clarifying response. This type of interaction keeps the focus on an individual and facilitates conversation.

As you listen and work with others, increase the frequency of the high facilitative responses. Use a lot of "what" and "how" questions. They help build close working relationships.

Acknowledging

People like to be acknowledged for their contributions. They might be embarrassed or feel awkward if what they say is ignored. Therefore, a simple *acknowledgment* can be facilitative, especially in groups.

Here are a few common and simple acknowledgments:

"Thank you for sharing that."

"Okay."

"Thanks."

"All right."

These responses, and others like them, help avoid the "plop experience." This is what happens when nobody responds before moving on to someone else. It is easy enough to recognize that you heard the person without discussing or making reference to any specific ideas. In addition, such a response is effective in bringing closure to someone's comments. It acknowledges, but it does not encourage the person to talk more at that time. It is a polite way of telling a person that you are now going to move onto another topic or person.

Linking

The *linking response* is especially facilitative in groups. It could be used to refer to someone who is not present. However, it is particularly effective when a group leader identifies similarities (and sometimes differences) among group members. You can link events or ideas that are shared between people. Or, you can link the feelings that they seem to have in common. For example:

> *"Juan and James, you both are interested in getting a job that gives you status, as well as money."* (ideas linked)
>
> *"Juan and James, you're excited and encouraged about the potential of your team."* (feelings linked)

As a peer helper leading a group, you can look for opportunities to link people. Linking develops a sense of togetherness and cohesiveness. Such responses focus on relationships, drawing common bonds and interests. They build the facilitative conditions of trust and acceptance, among others. They encourage group members to talk more openly.

Complimenting and confronting

There is one additional high facilitative response to be explored. It is using feedback as a strategy for complimenting and confronting. Because of the special nature of this response and its potency for effecting change, feedback will be discussed in detail in a separate chapter.

Thus, the six high facilitative responses which peer helpers rely upon are:

1. Feeling-focused responses
2. Clarifying and summarizing
3. Open questions
4. Acknowledging
5. Linking
6. Complimenting and confronting

Using High Facilitative Responses in Groups

Some responses, such as linking, are tailor-made for group work. You can use all of the facilitative responses in a group. You can respond to an individual or to the total group. You may notice, for instance, that a group member is apparently fatigued and struggling to be attentive. You might make a feeling-focused response. "Debbie, you're feeling tired and it's not easy to be a part of the group right now." Or, if most of the group is experiencing that same fatigue, you might say, "As I look around the group, I'm sensing there is a loss of energy. We're fatigued and it's dragging us down."

Likewise, it is possible to clarify or summarize a group member's point of view. For example, "If I followed you, Nick, you think that the lunch room policy should be changed." Or, "Let's see now, in the past few minutes our group has suggested at least four ways in which the policy might be changed. First, one idea was...."

Questions can be directed to an individual or to the total group. While simple acknowledgments are usually made to individuals for their contributions, they could also be directed to the whole group. For instance, "This has not been an easy topic to discuss. Thanks to all of you who shared your ideas and those who listened patiently."

Compliments are also possible to an individual in a group or to the total group. They will be discussed in the next chapter. "I was pleased and encouraged to see that we could start our group on time today. I know that it was not easy for you to get here. It makes me want to get on with the meeting and make the most of our time together." To an individual, you might say something like,:

"Nancy, I admired the way you stated your points. I'm also impressed with the way you kept your poise and calmly answered questions."

As a group leader, you might make all of the facilitative responses to individual members as they participate in the group. However, it will appear as if the group members are talking and relating to you only. This can choke off communication among group members, as they try to route their comments to the group through you. Group members benefit most when they talk with one another, not just with the leader.

Getting members of the group to use high facilitative responses helps them to relate better with each other. It also increases the number of helpful responses you can use to facilitate the group. For instance, you might get someone to make a feeling-focused response. You can say something like, "Nancy has shared a lot of things these past few minutes. Before we continue, are you (to the group) hearing pleasant or unpleasant feelings as she talks?" This would enable Nancy, in this case, to hear how others have listened to more than just her words. She would learn how they have tuned in to what she was experiencing.

This same type of eliciting response could also focus on helping group members clarify or summarize ideas expressed by someone. "Would someone in our group please tell us what you thought Nancy was saying? What seemed to be the key ideas?"

In the same manner, questions can also be elicited. "Who can ask Nancy a question that will help us learn more about what she's been telling us?" Or, "Okay, let's stop for a moment. What is a question that we can ask of

Nancy at this point?" And, as you may have imagined by this time, you can also get someone to make a linking response. You can ask the group to comment on some of the similarities that they have noticed among members. "What feelings have you heard in our group that some of us share in common?"

Thus, you can respond to individuals within a group or to the whole group. You can also make the facilitative responses yourself or elicit them from group members. Or, you can do both. Peer helping in groups always seems to go more smoothly, be more productive, and be less work to the leader, when you make and elicit the high facilitative responses.

Low Facilitative Responses

While all responses—at one time or another—might be helpful, some are likely to be less facilitative than others. Three common responses that are considered to be low facilitative are: a) reassuring/supporting, b) analyzing/interpreting, and c) advising/evaluating. Let us see how these fit into the facilitative model.

Reassuring/supporting

Reassuring/supporting kinds of responses are intended to tell people we believe in them. These responses are meant as encouragement, but they can easily dismiss someone's feelings and fail to be facilitative.

It is nice to have support. It feels good to be reassured, especially when our self-confidence is beginning to waiver. Like the other responses, reassuring and supporting statements can be helpful. However, we should not rush in and deny the feelings that are there. We might imply that the feelings are normal and so common that the person need not be concerned. For example:

"Everyone feels like that at your age."

"Things will turn out okay."

"You remind me a lot of another boy, Chris, and he did real well in that class."

"I know how you feel."

"It looks bad now, but things will be better tomorrow."

"There's nothing wrong with you that a couple of years of growth won't help."

Interestingly enough, reassuring or supporting statements are the second most popular responses used by untrained helpers when they are trying to be understanding. Only advice and evaluation are used more frequently. Why are such statements so popular?

Usually people report that they are trying to build self-confidence. They are trying to encourage a person to do better. Yet, when the statement has been studied for its impact, the result is less than expected. The real message that comes through is: "You should not feel as you do." Rather than communicate acceptance, respect, or understanding, this response treats the person's feelings as of little importance.

Have you heard statements similar to the following?

"It's always dark, just before the sun shines."

"We cannot direct the wind, but we can adjust our sails."

"Things will be better tomorrow."

"Remember, each dawn is a new beginning."

"Nobody's perfect."

"Things take time."

"Well, people are only human."

These philosophical truisms or Pollyanna-like statements are intended to offer encouragement, hope, and security. They frequently communicate a lack of interest or understanding. Reassuring or supporting statements might make a person feel good at first. Later, the real impact sets in and there is a feeling of being misunderstood. Thus, the conclusion: "Hey, you really didn't understand me. You just wanted to get rid of me."

Analyzing/interpreting

Some people think that they can be effective by analyzing a situation for another person. Analyzing and interpreting responses gained their popularity from early counseling theories. Old movies show counselors/therapists attempting to analyze problems. They are trying to tell persons why they are doing what they are doing. It is an attempt to look at some deep, hidden reasons that cause behavior.

Analyzing/interpreting responses also gained their popularity from the theory there is always a reason people do what they do. If people only had more insight about their behaviors, they could change. Look at these responses:

> *"Don't you see that being critical of your teacher is just another way of expressing your unhappiness with your father?"*
>
> *"You want to be an engineer because your father wants that for you."*
>
> *"You don't participate in the group because you're a shy person; you're afraid of failing."*
>
> *"You want to be in Mrs. Johnson's room because she was your sister's teacher."*

The intent is to explain the reason behind the person's thoughts or behaviors. There is an attempt to give the person insight by connecting one event to another. These responses are marked with "because" terminology and suggest what the person might or should think. There is an attempt to provide some meaning to a situation. However, most people do not like to have their behavior or ideas interpreted. It makes people defensive. It discourages them from revealing more ideas for fear that these ideas might also be interpreted or explained away.

An interpretation may be accurate, but most of the time it is only a guess—a hypothesis at best. Too often interpretative statements are textbook cliches (e.g. "You threw your pencil at her because you wanted attention.") This may or may not be true, but is it facilitative?

Another problem with analyzing or interpreting behavior is that the interpretation usually comes from a generalization about people. We frequently think that because we have studied other people, we now have some ideas as to why certain behavior occurs. The problem, of course, is that none of us like to be seen as a typical textbook case. We like to be viewed as unique. What was true for somebody else may not be true for us.

If you want to be facilitative, you will try to avoid such statements as: "Ah, ha! I know what your problem is"; or "The reason you don't like... is because...." Instead, you will want to help people think about themselves and their feelings. Rather than guessing what causes them to do what they do, you can help them to explore their thoughts and actions. It is a much safer approach because you do not have to be an "expert" in human behavior.

Advising/evaluating

Think about a time when you had a problem and looked for someone with whom to talk. Did you seek that person out for help in understanding your problem or were you hoping to get some advice? More often than not, you wanted your story to be heard. However, most people cannot wait to hear the full story and they tend to rush in with advice. Advice is not always helpful, although it may be a good solution to a problem.

Advice/evaluation is a category which describes responses that tells others how to behave or what to do. Advice is easy to give and most people are willing to give it. You will also note that advice can be a projection of needs, problems, or values. That is, we may begin to tell someone how we would solve the problem if we were in that person's shoes. For instance:

"Don't drop algebra. You'll need it later to get into college."

"Instead of arguing, you should try to see his point of view."

"If you'd make a plan, then you'd get more work done."

"What you need to do is to talk with your teacher about your concerns."

"One of the best things you can do now is to apologize and ask to get back in the class."

Listen to a group of people for awhile. You will soon hear some form of advice creeping into the conversation. It is easy to recognize and it frequently follows such lead-ins as:

"You should...."

"If I were you, I would...."

"The best way is to...."

"If you do not..., then...."

"If you would only...."

"You need to...."

"The thing to do is...."

When advice is relevant and practical, it can be helpful. It might facilitate people toward their goals. This is especially true when it is offered at an appropriate time. It helps if it is in the form of a suggestion instead of a directive or command. People may look to you for some timely advice and you might want to advise them on occasion. However, this shifts the responsibility for decision making to you. And, it is usually viewed as less respectful, understanding, and accepting.

People can be responsible for their own decisions. There is a lot of satisfaction in resolving problems. When we are given advice, there is a growing feeling that we are not responsible for ourselves. We are not capable of making decisions. Others seem so capable in giving advice. They make the solution sound so easy that we may begin to feel inadequate. This feeling of inadequacy creates more anxiety and defensiveness. Thus, advice with this result is not facilitative. It may even be harmful.

Evaluative statements are judgmental, whether positive or negative. They are unlikely to be facilitative. Even when used as a reinforcer (e.g. That is great! Good!), evaluation often closes the door to open communication. People are less inclined to self-disclose for fear of being rejected. Praise and criticism, although well-intended, communicate that you are judging the person.

Evaluation also makes us defensive in our thinking. This is true even when it is positive. When people evaluate our work, there is a tendency to think some of the following thoughts:

"They think that I am...."

"They want me to...."

"They probably won't like it if I...."

"I guess that means that they are... and I am...."

Some people use advice and evaluation in an attempt to encourage us to do something. When praise (evaluation), for example, is used to motivate, there is a tendency for us to believe that we must meet certain expectations before we are of value.

Still another problem of evaluating or giving advice is that it is often viewed as coming from a position of authority. The advice-giver assumes a role of superiority, while the receiver "looks up" to the expert. When a person is having a problem, that person does not want to feel inferior or talked down to.

It is much easier to give advice than it is to give of our time. It is difficult to get involved with another person's problems and conflicts. Giving advice is fast. At first glance, it makes us think that we are moving things along. Perhaps that is why it is used so much in our society. It is quick and easy, but often it is not very facilitative.

This is not to say that advice or evaluation should never be used. No doubt we have all benefited from some good advice at one time or another. When advice is timely and relevant to a situation, it can have a positive impact and can be very helpful.

To avoid giving non-facilitative advice, slow yourself down. You might first think to yourself: "I know what might be done, but I wonder if they will come to the same idea through exploring the situation more"; or "I know what I would do. Maybe if I help them examine the ideas and clarify the situation, they might come up with the same solution—or maybe a better one."

Effective peer helpers value others' ideas and try to understand their meaning and importance. They avoid labels (e.g. "snob," "weird," "negative," "stupid," "crybaby," "lazy"). They avoid statements that begin with: "Well, I think you should..." or "What you need to do is...." There is a place for advice and evaluation, but it is important to restrain one's self in an attempt to find the most appropriate solution.

Summary

Because some helpers want to push things along in their busy schedules, they have a tendency to use too many low facilitative responses. Impatience and a press for time often cause them to rush in with low facilitative responses. You may give advice occasionally. As a helper, you can give reassuring statements and you may make interpretations. However, it is timely advice, timely interpretations, and timely reassurance that make the critical difference.

There are other responses that might be included as high facilitative. You can always look at them in light of the facilitative model. To be safe, increase the frequency of the high facilitative responses in your work as a peer helper. Then you will probably do many things well. You are more likely to be involved in the helping process. Then, you can take more risks. You can recover from what may seem to be mistakes and achieve more goals. High facilitative responses are the peer helper's most important tools.

Activity 5.1

Learning to be Facilitative (Triads)

Purpose:

To practice using three high facilitative responses: 1) Feeling-focused, 2) Clarifying or summarizing, and 3) Open questions.

Materials:

Response checklist, or The Facilitator's Report Card, *pencil/pen.*

Procedure:

1. With two other people, form a group (triads). Begin by numbering off: 1, 2 and 3. Let No. 1 be the talker, No. 2 the facilitator and No. 3 the observer.

2. The talker begins by speaking to the facilitator for three minutes. The observer watches and takes notes. The talker speaks on: "Something I Would Like to Change About Myself."

3. The facilitator helps the talker by responding with high facilitative responses (focusing on feelings, clarifying or summarizing ideas, and asking open questions). There is to be no advice, no praise and no interpretations. Follow the lead of the talker by being a careful listener.

4. The observer watches the facilitator and records observations. The *Facilitator's Report Card* might be used as a checklist. After three minutes, the

observer tells the facilitator what seemed to be happening (about two minutes is allowed for this part).

5. Now, the same talker, facilitator and observer go through another three minute round. This time the talker speaks about "Something I Like About Myself." The facilitator and observer repeat their same roles. Again, after three minutes, the observer gives a report.

6. Switch roles in a second and third round (with the same talking assignments) until all three have been in each role.

7. After each person has been in all three roles, the group discusses the following:

Was it harder to talk about things you would change about yourself or things about which you like? Was it easier to be the talker, the facilitator, or the observer/recorder? Were both pleasant and unpleasant feelings shared? What kind of questions were most helpful? Were there any facilitator comments made which seemed not helpful?

What were some of the thoughts and feelings that members had when they were working in each of the roles? How can this experience be used with middle school students who are shy about sharing their ideas and feelings?

The Facilitator's Report Card

Instructions:

Tally your responses. Then, show your agreement with each of the following statements by marking the scale: (SA = Strongly Agree, A = Agree, NS = Not Sure, D = Disagree, SD = Strongly Disagree).

He/She

SA A NS D SD 1. Interpreted or analyzed

SA A NS D SD 2. Evaluated or gave advice

SA A NS D SD 3. Used how and what questions

SA A NS D SD 4. Made feeling-focused responses

SA A NS D SD 5. Listened well

SA A NS D SD 6. Supported and reassured inappropriately

SA A NS D SD 7. Interrupted unnecessarily

SA A NS D SD 8. Attempted to clarify ideas using fresh words

SA A NS D SD 9. Talked about self rather than kept focus on the talker

SA A NS D SD 10. Denied or avoided obvious feelings of the talker

SA A NS D SD 11. Had good eye contact

Activity 5.2

Listening in a Debate

Purpose:

To develop an awareness of the art of careful listening.

Materials:

None

Procedure:

1. Form a group with two other persons (a triad). One person is the monitor and time keeper while the other two people are to be the talkers.

2. Pick a controversial topic, such as one of those listed below. One talker agrees to argue for one point of view. The other talker agrees to take the opposite side.

3. The first talker has one minute in which to express views on the chosen topic. During this time, the monitor and the other participant listen carefully to ideas and feelings.

4. Once the first talker stops, the second talker must summarize the key statements made by the previous speaker. Then the second talker can offer a point of view. The first talker must first agree that such a summary is accurate. The role of the monitor is to insure that an accurate summarizing takes place. Then the second person may offer his or her point of view.

5. The two talkers continue to exchange points of view (after summarizing the previous statements of the other) until they agree that each knows the viewpoints of the other.

6. The monitor now asks the talkers to think about any pleasant or unpleasant feelings that may have been present. The monitor offers a list of those that he or she heard or observed.

7. The monitor now changes place with one of the talkers. A new topic is chosen and the process continues.

Possible Topics:

- Using illegal drugs is a bigger problem with low income than with high income people.
- It is easier to be a girl than a boy.
- Only people over 40 should do the fighting in wars that kill people.
- Smoking cigarettes and drinking alcohol is considered "a cool" or neat thing to do.
- Middle school youth have more problems than other age groups.
- Everyone is equal... it doesn't make any difference about the color of one's skin or ethnic background.

Activity 5.3

What's Happening with Today's Youth?

Purpose:

To learn more about problems facing today's youth and to become more sensitive about the needs of our society.

Materials:

None

Procedure:

1. With another member of the class or a group, write five statements which begin:

   "One thing most people do not understand about adolescents today is...."

2. Present it to the rest of the class.

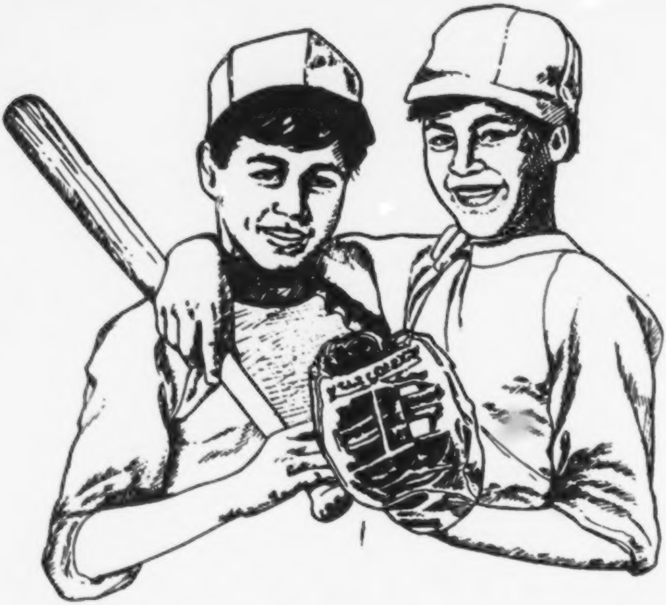
3. Practice listening for pleasant and unpleasant feelings and making feeling-focused responses. Practice clarifying and summarizing responses. Practice asking open-ended questions, especially those that begin with "How...." and "What...."

Chapter 6

Giving Feedback: Complimenting and Confronting

"We find comfort among those who agree with us—growth among those who don't."

Frank A. Clark



Marc really enjoyed spending the weekend with his friend, Jerome, and his family. They shared special times together. Jerome was fun and he was a good listener. He shared his thoughts with Marc. They talked a lot about how they were to play on the same team and win championships. They also talked about how Jerome might be able to get along better with his step-father. It was hard for Jerome to say thanks for the fun times together and for being his best friend. He just didn't know how, but he wanted to say something.

Non-verbal and verbal communication take place rapidly between people. When people talk and relate with one another, impressions are formed. These impressions are a result of the personal impact that people have on each other.

Feedback Defined

"Feedback" is a term that was first used in electronics. Technically speaking, it implies that a circuit is looped back to its original source. This flow back allows for information of the effect that produced the results. It is then possible to change or keep things the same. Thermostats in our houses, for example, use information about temperature to activate air conditioning or heating units. Commercial airline pilots depend upon feedback from their flight instruments. This feedback confirms or corrects the airplane's course. In a similar sense, feedback can be a part of peer helping.

Feedback is telling others the type of personal impact they are having on you. Feedback tells what you think is happening. It can confirm the type of impressions you are making, or what others are experiencing when they are with you. It can also be used to confront behavior and attitudes. Feedback can suggest changes. Personal feedback, especially when facilitative, can be valuable. It helps people to stay on track, to make minor adjustments, or to chart new directions.

We know there are some blind spots in our relationships. They occur when we do not tell others the type of impact they are having on us. The other person is blind to that information. Likewise, when people share what they have noticed about us, then our blind spots are reduced.

For instance, there are things that you know about your friends that you probably have not shared with them. You have been with them in different places. You noticed how they behaved, for better or for worse. You watched and listened. You had certain personal reactions. Unless you took the time to tell them what you saw, that information may be unknown to them. Perhaps they assume things about you that are not true. Maybe they think what they did had no bearing on your feelings and behaviors, or that you didn't care.

Compliments and confrontations, when done in a facilitative way, can improve relationships between people. Relationships are not one-sided. If you are only listening and responding to other people's ideas and feelings, they may begin to wonder about your own ideas. They may be especially interested in your thoughts concerning them. They want to know what you are thinking and feeling. They want some feedback from you.

How do we learn about ourselves? How do we learn who we are? Our parents, friends, neighbors, and others in our lives say and do things which influence us. Sometimes what they say is related to general events or situations. Sometimes it is related to other people. What they say and do is directly related to how they see us. If their thoughts and feelings about us are clear, then we do not have to make assumptions or read between the lines. If they are hidden, fuzzy, or imprecise, then we can become confused and uncertain. It can cause us to be wary or cautious.

Our behavior is influenced by consequences. If you tell a joke and people laugh, then you might think of yourself as a good story teller. You may be encouraged to tell other stories, or at least to retell the same one. If people were to frown or scowl, instead of laugh at the story, then you might doubt yourself. You might wonder if you should give up telling that story. Your image of yourself may change. You might even conclude that you are not very good at telling stories. Some people refer to this as reinforcement. If you are positively reinforced, you are likely to continue or repeat similar actions.

For our purposes, we can view complimenting and confronting as forms of personal feedback. When done in a facilitative way, they are added to the list of high facilitative skills described in the previous chapter. How can you give people feedback without judging them? How can you give feedback without making people feel defensive?

The Facilitative Feedback Model

Facilitative feedback consists of a three-part response. How you put your thoughts into these three parts will determine whether you are giving a compliment or a gentle confrontation. Look closely at the three parts.

Part 1: Be specific about the behavior.

What has the person done? Give an example or cite an instance of when you noticed the behavior. Avoid labeling or using generalities by giving specifics. Describe what you saw or heard. If it helps, begin by saying, "One of the things I noticed about you is...."

Part 2: Tell how the behavior makes you feel.

Tune in to yourself and sort out your feelings. Think about a list of pleasant and unpleasant feeling words. Pick the one or two that stand out when in the presence of the behavior. Is your experience pleasant or unpleasant? Or do you have mixed feelings? Select your words carefully.

Part 3: Tell what your feelings make you want to do.

When you feel as you do, because you are in the presence of the person's behavior, how do you want to respond? What do your feelings make you want to do?

For practice, let's see if you can identify the three parts of facilitative feedback in the following response:

"Chris, you said you were going to get your part of the report done by Friday morning and you did. I also noticed that it followed our outline. I'm proud of you and it makes me want to work with you again on other projects."

Now, try this example:

"Sandy, I'm confused. I'm not sure what I want to say but I have to talk with you. This morning you said that I was saying untrue things about you and that I was a gossip. Now, you tell me that you didn't mean it and I'm still one of your best friends."

In the first example, a compliment was paid to Chris. The three parts of the facilitative feedback model were presented in a 1, 2, 3 order of parts. In the case of Sandy, however, the three parts appeared in a different order (2, 3, 1) and were the basis of a confrontation.

The order of the feedback parts can be interchanged. It is possible that their placement might create a different emphasis. The difference is probably not significant. The three parts can be mixed easily. Only the first two parts are needed for a basic response.

Peer helpers who have used it report that the feedback model helps to slow them down. It helps them to collect and organize their thoughts. Communication is more accurate. The three parts are a format, similar to one that you might use to write a well-organized and thoughtful letter. They are also like the elements of a math formula, with each part contributing to a result.

As you can see, the difference between a compliment and a confrontation can be found in part 2, which focuses on feelings. If you speak about your pleasant feelings, your feedback will be perceived as a compliment. If you use unpleasant feeling words, then it will likely be experienced by the other person as a confrontation.

Compliments, just like confrontations, can be difficult for people to receive. Most people are not used to them. Initially, they might feel defensive and try to dismiss your response. They may feel uneasy and they may not know how to respond. A simple "thank you" might be enough. However, the warmth of the spotlight, although it feels good, may make some feel embarrassed. Then, they quickly try to dismiss the matter. For example: "Oh, it wasn't much. I was just doing my job." Or, "I know you would have done the same if you were I." Despite their immediate response or their ability to handle a personal comment, the message was communicated and heard.

When you are working with a group, you can give feedback to an individual or you can direct it to the whole group. You might say,:

> *"You know, I really look forward to our meetings. I guess it's because I'm so encouraged and impressed with our group. For instance, we've been talking about this last topic for almost 25 minutes. You seem to be listening carefully to what each person is saying. Your eyes were turned to each person who talked and there have been some excellent questions asked."*

Again you can see the three parts. In this example, the order of the parts is reversed (3, 2, 1), but the compliment is clear. It is much better than a simple, "Gee, this is a great group. We are getting a lot done and you are good group members." Enthusiasm and pleasure may be communicated through the voice and gestures. However, the group members are left hanging regarding what they did to merit such a conclusion.

Some people have to guess about the personal impact of their behaviors. Look at this example:

> *"The trouble with you, Tina, is that you're lazy. If you'd just work harder and get your priorities straight, you'd do a lot better. What you need to do is...."*

In this situation, the person talking to Tina was bombarding her with labels and advice. Tina was being judged and criticized. Such words, even if well-intended, were probably not very effective. If they were meant to inspire Tina, the message was probably lost. It most likely caused her to feel guilty, or even angry. It tended to provoke defensiveness. There was no gentleness, no specific information, no caring, and no personal sharing of the impact that Tina's behavior was having on the person. Such feedback is likely to make Tina argumentative and unwilling to explore her situation.

In a similar fashion, shallow praise also fails to communicate feedback. For instance:

> *"One thing I've noticed about you, Larry, is that you are such a nice person. You've got a great personality. If others were like you, things would be much better around here."*

This response was probably intended as a compliment. However, the response was not specific and general labels were used. Larry was left with a vague idea that the person likes him, but he is probably not sure why. He may even wonder what he did to deserve such a positive remark. "Great personality." What does that mean?

Some Helpful Guidelines

Most people enjoy hearing compliments. They like to know that they have made a favorable impression and that they have been noticed in a positive way. Compliments create warm feelings and make people think friendly thoughts.

Some researchers have suggested that teachers praise students only about two to three percent of the time. They frequently use such brief evaluative words as "Great" or "Excellent." This also seems to be true of parents and their children. Compliments are not even common among friends.

One young boy said his close friend didn't need to say anything. His friend knew how he felt toward him and how important their friendship was. Yet, the friend, when asked, replied that he sensed the close friendship too and enjoyed it, but he still wasn't quite sure what his friend liked about him. "There are just some good feelings between us and we click well together.... I'm not sure why."

We often assume too much. We need to communicate our positive feelings more, especially when they are related to something that someone has done. General guidelines are not needed for compliments, except you are encouraged to use all three parts of the facilitative feedback model.

We have learned that when we share our unpleasant feelings—a form of confrontation—there is a tendency for people to be threatened and to pull back. They may become suspicious and wonder about our motives. No doubt we will get their attention. If you want people to hear your message, consider the following guidelines.

First, do you have any "chips in the bank?" This expression is another way of asking if you have taken the time to listen to others. Have you responded to them with high facilitative responses? Have you encouraged them to talk about the situation that is of concern to you? Every time you use a feeling-focused response, clarify or summarize an idea, or ask an open question, you are building a positive relationship. You are investing in that personal relationship with each response. This is often enough to give you a reserve of goodwill and a friendship upon which you can draw. Without such a reserve, a confrontation may fall on deaf ears or have little impact.

One girl reported that she intended to confront some classmates. However, after listening to their stories and after making an effort to use facilitative responses, there was more understanding and fewer unpleasant feelings. There was no need to confront.

You may have someone in mind who strikes you in an unpleasant way. Make a concentrated effort to listen to that person. Increase the frequency of your high facilitative responses—no matter the topic. You will probably gain a better idea of whether or not you want to speak up regarding your unpleasant feelings.

A second guideline: Is your unpleasant feeling a persistent one? Nobody likes a grouch or someone who "pops off" at every little turn. Life is full of conflict and you do not want to confront everyone who has created an unpleasant feeling in you. Yet, it is neither healthy nor wise to let things build to the point that they "boil over." That can be messy and hard to clean up. When persistent feelings are left to simmer and boil, then a relationship suffers. Timely confrontations are valuable and have a place in a friendly relationship.

There are times, of course, when you will not be able to build up that reserve in advance. You might have just met someone. You will have to gamble that a confrontation (speaking about your unpleasant feelings) will not bankrupt the relationship. A few "chips in the bank" before your feedback may be valuable.

Finally, which words best communicate your ideas? If you are too intense and choose words that are loaded with heavy emotion, you run the risk of not being heard. The impact of the feedback response could be diminished, if not dismissed.

There are many unpleasant feeling words which could be used in a confrontation. Some are similar, but they each have a slightly different shade of meaning. Let your inner experiences guide you to find the most appropriate feeling word. It is not helpful, for instance, to tell other people you "hate" them, when what they do "irritates" or "annoys" you. Likewise, the term "love" can, occasionally, be too powerful or too intense for some persons. You might prefer to use feeling words such as "close," "care," or "warm." Words that are too intense may not serve your purpose. Obviously, your choice of words depends upon the situation, your best judgment, and your personal style. It might help to make a list of words to avoid because they make people defensive. They may serve no useful purpose.

Suggestions or advice, if any, may be included as one aspect of the third part of the feedback model. It is more effective when qualified and linked to the source—your feelings. Change might be considered, maybe implied in a confrontation. But, it is that person's responsibility to continue or change the behavior referred to in the confrontation. When feedback is tied to advice ("...therefore, you should...”), it may not be effective. This goes beyond the purpose of feedback, which is to communicate the impact that someone’s behavior is having.

Remember to be concise in your remarks. Try to avoid wordiness or repeating yourself. The message can get lost when there are too many words or if there are too many ideas in one statement. Being brief and to the point also keeps you from rambling and saying things you do not want to say.

The feedback model can help you organize your thoughts and feelings, but they must be genuine ones. It would be a serious mistake to make something up or to say something you think someone wants or needs to hear. A feedback response that is less than honest will defeat your purpose and show disrespect.

In addition, you may use the model to give yourself some feedback. How would you compliment yourself? What about a confrontation? You may, on occasion, want to elicit some personal feedback from others. While they will speak for themselves, you can coach them through a thinking process by asking questions directed to each of the three parts: What have I done... and how has that made you feel... and behave?

Summary

Facilitative feedback, the art of complimenting and confronting, is an essential skill for peer helpers. Giving and receiving feedback can be threatening or exciting. Its effectiveness often depends upon timing and readiness. Obviously, the more chips that you have in the relationship's bank, the more likely the person will be receptive to hearing what you have to say. You gain those chips through feeling-focused responses, clarifying or summarizing ideas, and by asking open questions.

Facilitative feedback is systematic. It offers you some degree of control over your emotions. It can generate energy in a relationship. After you have given feedback, it is time to be attentive again. This is especially true if you are confronting. It is not a time to sit back and relax, perhaps thinking, "Whew, I'm glad that's over." Rather, it is time to go to work, to watch for reactions, and to listen carefully. You must be prepared to follow up with more high facilitative responses.

Feedback tends to make people feel closer to one another, no matter whether the focus is on pleasant or unpleasant feelings. The end result depends, of course, on how those feelings are communicated. With the help of feedback, relationships grow as people work their way through events, thoughts, and feelings. Communication is open. There is an increased awareness. There is an honest and genuine relationship.

Activity 6.1

Discussing Unfinished Sentences

Purpose:

To help you explore some of your attitudes and beliefs. To practice leading a group discussion.

Materials:

Pencil/pen

Procedure:

1. Complete the following unfinished sentences:

    a. The biggest problem with students in our school is....
    b. If I had a problem, then I would....
    c. Young people who use illegal drugs or drink alcohol do so because....
    d. If I could make one change in my life, it would be to....

2. In groups of four, share your responses to the unfinished sentences. Explore your ideas and feelings.

3. Participants take turns being the group leader, using high facilitative responses: 1) Feeling-focused, 2) Clarifying/Summarizing, 3) Open Questions, 4) Acknowledging, 5) Linking (feelings or ideas), and 6) Facilitative Feedback.

4. Discuss what you learned or relearned as a result of the activity.

Activity 6.2

Compliments and Confrontations

Purpose:

To practice using the three-step feedback model by focusing on someone outside the class.

Materials:

An empty chair.

Procedure:

1. Form a circle with about five to six people. An empty chair is placed in the middle.
2. Each person thinks of someone who is *not* sitting in the circle. As you think of the person, what is something that he or she does that you like? What pleasant feeling(s) do you get? Then, when you have that feeling(s), what do you do?
3. Now, imagine that the person is sitting in the empty chair. Tell that person your thoughts, using the feedback model. If it helps, begin by saying, "One of the things I have noticed about you is...." Proceed through the parts (Be specific about the behavior; tell how the behavior makes you feel; and, what your feelings make you want to do).
4. After everyone has had a turn focusing on a compliment, think of a person with whom you have had an unpleasant experience. Using the model and imagining that the individual is sitting in the empty chair, confront that person.
5. Discuss the experience after everyone has had a turn.

6. Talk about the following:
    - How would you compliment a student who has been coming to school regularly, even though his or her grades continue to be low?
    - How would you confront a student who keeps using illegal drugs?
    - How would you confront a student who seems to have quit trying in school? You have worked hard together to help him or her to have more success?
    - What would you say to a person who has overcome some language barriers to be successful in school?
    - What would you say to students who say they might as well give up because school is too hard?
    - Would you like to go around the circle again, this time taking turns giving feedback to members who are in the circle with you?
    - How would you tell individuals how impressed you are because they are turning in more of their home work?
    - What would you say to someone who is teasing you and suddenly that person's words begin to hurt you, going beyond having fun?
    - Would you like to go around the circle again, this time taking turns to give feedback to members who are in the circle with you?

Activity 6.3

Giving and Receiving Feedback (Go-Around)

Purpose:

To practice giving and receiving feedback.

Materials:

None

Procedure:

1. Form a small group, about five people to a group. Get with people with whom you would like to talk with. Tell them the impact they have on you. Learn about the impact that you have on them.

2. Review in your own mind, or perhaps in discussion with others, the three parts of giving feedback (Complimenting or Confronting). It can be helpful if you: a) call the person by name, b) look at that person, and c) talk directly to the person. If it helps, keep a list of the three parts of the feedback model in front of you.

3. Someone in the circle volunteers to begin. He or she then talks to each person in the group, in turn, giving each person some positive feedback (Compliment). The person receiving the feedback listens and makes no comments.

4. After the first volunteer has given each person in the group some feedback, another person volunteers. As before, feedback is given to each person. Again, each member listens to the feedback and makes no comments.

5. Everyone takes a turn. Finally, the group talks about the experience. The other high facilitative responses are used frequently during the discussion.

Chapter 7

Deciding

"The greatest mistake you can make in this life is to be continually fearing you will make one."

Elbert Hubbard

It had never been a problem before. We showed up for school. The teacher put the schedule for the day on the board and we followed it. Now they are asking us to choose what classes we want to take next year. What we take next year affects the choices we can make in high school. It is all so confusing. There must be some way to know what choices to make.

You now know the value of listening to others, identifying feelings, and making high facilitative responses. What's next? As a peer helper, you will be hearing problems. Sometimes they will be difficult ones. Although you are not a professional counselor, you can help people solve their problems.

Behind every problem is a decision that has to be made. There is a choice, or sometimes many choices, that an individual must make to resolve a problem. Many people find it difficult to make a decision because they are confused. They do not know how to get organized or to approach the situation. Peer helpers assist others to solve problems by working with them in a decision-making process. They also encourage them to apply this process in their daily lives.

It is important to make good decisions. Each decision people make influences their future. Individuals become the product of their choices because they determine the direction their lives will take. Choosing cannot be avoided. Therefore, helping people to learn how to make responsible choices and decisions is a part of peer helping.

Good decisions can result when a systematic approach is applied to the problems at hand. Typically, people seeking help are looking for a quick solution to their problems. They may seek advice from a neutral party, or from someone they think is an expert. They hope that the advice will bring them relief and satisfaction. This hope and expectation frequently tempts helpers to jump in with some type of advice.

Advice-giving, you recall, is considered a low facilitative response. While advice may be appropriate, people seeking help are unlikely to follow advice or make wise choices without the aid of an effective decision-making process. Peer helpers can assist individuals to learn a decision-making model. This model can be used whenever they are required to make an important decision.

Decision Making

Responsible and effective decisions are more likely to result if the person trying to make a decision performs five specific tasks: Defining, investigating, choosing, acting, and evaluating. These tasks are approached through five focused questions.

1. What is my specific problem or concern?
2. What are the alternatives and the consequences of each?
3. Which of the possible alternatives should I choose?
4. When and how will I act upon my choice?
5. How will I know if I made the right choice?

As you help someone, make a special effort to use this approach to problem solving and decision making. Then, the next time the person faces an important decision, the system could be used again, even if you are not there to help. Now, let's examine these tasks and questions in more detail.

1. Defining: What is my specific problem or concern?

The first step to solving a problem is to identify the problem. Individuals may be experiencing anxiety, frustration, or other unpleasant feelings. When asked: "What is the problem?" They may find it difficult to explain. Personal stress and pressure can prevent them from clearly identifying the issues. Using high facilitative responses (e.g. focused feeling, clarifying and summarizing, and open questions), peer helpers can assist individuals to talk about and define their problems.

You will want to discuss as many specific details as you can. Advice given to beginning newspaper reporters could be useful here. Obtain answers to the questions: Who? What? When? Where? And How? For example: Who else is involved in the situation? What specifically is the issue? When and where does the problem occur and under what conditions? Answers to these and other questions can help an individual examine a problem or concern.

How a problem is defined determines to some degree what action will be taken to solve it. If a problem is defined in vague and general terms, it is difficult to develop a solid plan of action. Clearly defined problems are needed before you can decide on a plan of action. For example, instead of defining a problem as one of depression or low self-concept, ask what needs to happen. What needs to be learned that would improve the situation? Defining the problem enables you and the people you are helping to think of questions that must be answered. It identifies tasks that must be accomplished.

2. Investigating: What are the alternatives and consequences of each?

In every decision there are many alternatives. Everyday decision making could be an impossible task if you were to investigate every possible one. Peer helpers are interested in highlighting, choice making, and shedding light on alternative choices. People want to make satisfying decisions. This requires that they be aware of a reasonable and manageable number of alternatives.

It is usually productive to help people list as many alternative solutions as they can. This is done without evaluating or judging those possibilities. "Brainstorming" is one technique for generating alternatives without a concern for consequences. Permitting the free-flow of ideas, however ridiculous they may sound at the moment, might result in some ideas being listed that could eventually lead to good alternatives. A quick review of the list should reveal several ideas that merit further exploration.

For every possible solution or alternative, there can be positive or negative consequences. The preferred choice is usually one where the pleasant outcomes outweigh the unpleasant ones. Therefore, identifying the consequences of each alternative before making a choice is a valuable step.

Sometimes all the alternative solutions are unpleasant and the individual chooses not to decide. Choosing not to decide is in itself a decision. You can help others realize that non-decisions are really decisions. The choice is often to take more control of life and to make more conscious decisions. To this end, helping others to learn and apply the decision-making model results in more responsible individuals.

3. Choosing: Which of the alternatives should I choose?

After exploring some alternatives and consequences, it is time to make a choice. What is important to the individual? Although individuals are aware of some of their feelings and beliefs, they frequently are not sure of them. A personal belief system is the core of what drives a person. Clarifying values is an integral part of making a thoughtful and personally rewarding decision.

Although the choices most individuals make are helpful to them, some thought should be given to the needs and interests of others as well. More often than not, somebody else is affected by every decision, since people do not live in isolation. What impact will such a choice have on others? How will this, in turn, affect the consequences that might be experienced? Will the decision create more or less problems with other people? Is the final decision something that the person is willingly to own and to be responsible for?

Although choosing is a basic right of every human being, some individuals have given away much of their decision-making responsibilities. They prefer situations which require a minimum amount of decision making on their part. They are captives of their environment, abandoning a large portion of their natural lives. Peer helpers can encourage these individuals to exercise their personal and public choices. They can help them to understand and value the decision-making process.

While there are some events in life which we do not control (e.g. birth, the aging process, natural disasters, and death), we do have a choice as to how to react or cope with them. Even when confronted with problems that have been caused by others, we remain free to choose how we will respond. Central to mastering the decision-making process, therefore, is accepting the challenge and responsibility for making a choice.

4. Acting:
When and how will I act upon my choice?

Putting things off, procrastination, is a self-defeating behavior that plagues most of us. Even after a decision has been made, special attention must be given to making something happen. Obviously, this calls for a plan of action.

A plan of action outlines various steps which will move a person toward a goal. Each plan should contain specific things to be done and a time table for doing them. A clearly stated action plan will make assessing the outcomes easier.

When action is continually delayed, careful attention should be given to the first part of the plan. Perhaps the problem was not clearly defined. Alternatives may not have been realistic or feasible. The consequences were not carefully considered or thoroughly explored. If a review of the decision-making process results in the same action plan, the steps of the plan might be further divided into still smaller and more immediate steps. In addition, it might be productive to explore the feelings associated with the first few steps. How are they related to avoidance or resistance? Are the feelings a cue that the choice or decision is not a satisfactory one? What additional efforts are needed to think through the situation?

5. Evaluating: How will I know if I made the right choice?

After a choice or decision has been made and the plan implemented, outcomes need to be assessed. How do you know if the right choice was made? One's personal values system will influence the evaluation procedures and the interpretation of results. Ask the question: "How am I feeling about what has happened?" If the internal feedback received is compatible with the value system, positive feelings should result.

The more intimately individuals experience themselves and their surroundings, the easier it becomes to predict the results from their decisions.

After the results of a decision has been evaluated, the decision-making process begins all over. New alternatives are considered and new plans are developed.

Decision-making Dialogue

Look at the dialogue below. It is a short synopsis of an interaction between a helper and a helpee. It illustrates the decision-making model.

Defining

Peer Helper:

How can I help you? What is the situation?

Helpee:

I'm not sure. Things haven't been going very well for me at school lately. I don't seem to have the same enthusiasm I used to have. I'm not sure what's going on.

Peer Helper:

You're frustrated. You don't know what has happened to make things seem so discouraging.

Helpee:

It is frustrating.... School hasn't changed.... I still hang out with the same kids... but, it is getting harder to go to school every day.

Peer Helper:

Even though school seems to be the same, something is keeping you from enjoying it the way you used to.

Helpee:

Yes, I find myself thinking about excuses that I could use to keep from going.

Peer Helper:

What is it at school that you are trying to avoid?

Helpee:

It's just so dull. There is nothing happening anymore. I'm bored with it all.

Investigating

Peer Helper:

What could you do to make school more interesting?

Helpee:

I don't know.... Well, I guess I could get more involved in some school activity. Lately I've just been going to classes.

Peer Helper:

Getting involved in more activities is one possibility. Are there any others?

Helpee:

It sounds ridiculous, but I guess I could turn my school work into a game. I know John pretends he's a ball player or something and gives himself points. I'm not sure how it works.

Peer Helper:

It seems a little silly to you, but let's put it down anyway. We'll look at how it might be done later.

Helpee:

I suppose I need some new goals. I don't feel like I'm accomplishing anything any more. I just plod along.

Peer Helper:

Setting goals, maybe some daily ones, might help . Are there any other possibilities?

Helpee:

No, I don't think so.

Peer Helper:

Nothing else is coming to mind. Okay, now, let's look at the list of possibilities. First, the idea about getting involved in a school activity.

Helpee:

I guess that would be all right. But, I really don't need more to do. What I need to do is to get more interested in my school work.

Peer Helper:

You seem unsure about that choice. All right, look at the next one.... "Turn your school work into a game...." What did you mean by that?

Helpee:

I read somewhere that if you could get the same enthusiasm for work that you have for sports and other activities, then work can be more fun. That's what got me thinking about John and his way of doing things.

Peer Helper:

You seem to like that idea. Tell me more about that one.

Helpee:

I think that one makes the most sense. Although my school work is kind of routine, it might be a challenge to measure how much I accomplish in a day. Maybe I could set up a chart listing each of my classes and measure how much I do. I could set some goals and reward myself if I reach my goals. It sounds a lot better than what I'm doing right now.

Choosing

Peer Helper:

Based on your enthusiasm, you seem to have made a choice.

Helpee:

Yeah, I can make a game out of my school work by setting up some daily goals that I can shoot at.

Peer Helper:

Okay, now how will you go about that?

Acting

Peer Helper:

Talk some more about your plan.

Helpee:

I am going to start tonight. I need to make some charts. I need to decide how I will measure my progress. After I get the charts made, I'll use them.

Peer Helper:

When will be the first day you plan to use them at school?

Helpee:

Monday. I'm going to try to have them ready for use on Monday.

Peer Helper:

Try?

Helpee:

I'll do more than try. I'll start Monday morning keeping track of my progress on three of my classes.

Peer Helper:

You seem up for this... more determined. You like this idea.

Helpee:

Yeah, but I'm still not sure about the game part or how to reward myself.

Peer Helper:

First, let's look at the reward and then the rules of the game. What are some things that you like to do?

Evaluating

Peer Helper (at a later meeting)*:*

How has it been going?

Helpee:

A lot better. I really had lost my energy. I hated going to school. My grades were really down. But, I've come up 20% in the last week. My goal for the rest of the month is to increase it by another 10%. And, the teachers have noticed the difference.

Peer Helper:

You seem a lot more excited about going to school.

Helpee:

Yes! I wished we had talked a long time ago. I wouldn't be so far behind. Thanks for your help.

The Problem-solving Model

By this time you have learned that facilitating others can be a step-by-step approach. There are facilitative skills that can be used systematically. Although there are many things that you can do, high facilitative responses can increase your chances of being an effective helper. Therefore, increase the use of them in your work as a peer facilitator.

Using the high facilitative responses with a problem-solving model can help people to make decisions. They also can be encouraged to take some next steps toward their goals. One problem-solving model that has been used to advantage by peer helpers involves four key questions. The questions are:

1. What is the problem or situation?
2. What have you done to make things better?
3. What else could you do?
4. What is your next step?

The first question encourages a person (or group) to talk about the events related to a problem or situation. The person talks about feelings and behaviors. Attention might be given to the feelings and actions of other people who might be involved in the situation or who are part of the problem. This first step gives the person a chance to say things aloud and to explore the circumstances. In doing so, the person may gain some additional insights. Obviously, feeling-focused, clarifying or summarizing, and open questions are excellent follow-up responses to this first question.

In due time, the second question is asked, "What have you done up to this point?" Or, "What have you tried?" "How effective have these attempts been?" "What were the results?" Again, these kinds of questions are followed by feeling-focused responses, clarifying and summarizing responses, and other relevant open questions.

After the person has described the situation and told about the efforts to solve the problem or to make a decision, the next question is, "What else could you do?" This invites the person to think of other ideas and to brainstorm possibilities. It encourages the person to draw upon personal resources and ideas. It might surprise you to know how resourceful a person can be when given an opportunity to explore freely a situation or an idea. The person might need only the luxury of thinking aloud about some ideas.

After the person has related what else might be done, the facilitator might have thought of something that was not mentioned. That could be added as a possibility. It is made as a tentative suggestion. For instance, "I was wondering if you might...." Or, "What about...?" Or, "What would happen if you...?" Or, "One thing you might want to consider would be to...." In each case, the idea is proposed only as a possible consideration. It is not offered as advice. Of course, the person chooses to consider or reject the suggestion.

There may be some occasions when you will want to offer stronger advice. For instance, you might say, "One thing I would recommend that you do is to talk with one of our school counselors." Or, "It seems to me that this would be a good time to tell your parents about the situation. How would you feel about that?"

Finally, the fourth question is posed, "What is your next step?" The person is now asked to think about an immediate plan of action. There might be several steps that need to be taken to accomplish a goal or to solve a problem. "What is a possible next step that can be taken in the future?" The primary concern now is to help the person think of something that can be done within the next few days. The question might even be stated, "What is something that you are going to do today or tomorrow that will get you started toward your goal?"

The next step is described in behaviors. It is what the person is going to do. If the person says, "I need to think about this some more," then you might ask, "How and when will you go about doing that?" If the person says, "I guess I need to talk with one of the school counselors," you might ask, "How and when will you do this?" The follow-up questions (how and when) coach the person through a thinking process that involves an action to be taken. Nothing is taken for granted. After all, there are many people who have a game plan thought out in their minds. However, they fail to take the next steps that are needed to move them toward their goals. They need help in being more specific and in setting a time to start.

If any person arrives at a possible next step that appears to be, in your best judgment, harmful to one's self or to others, then you will give that person feedback. You may confront the person. You will ask that person to reconsider his or her plans. It may be necessary to refer the individual for more help or to report the situation to a responsible adult. This may be a counselor, a teacher, an administrator, or your trainer and peer project supervisor. Some things cannot be held as a matter of confidentiality. In fact, the person trusts you to help get assistance.

All of the facilitative skills described in this book will be useful to you. You need not be the expert or someone who is burdened with other people's problems. Rather, you are a facilitator. You help others to explore ideas, feelings, and behaviors. You encourage them to take positive actions that make their lives better. You help them to get additional assistance when needed.

As you use the skills that you have learned in this book, you will be amazed at your own resourcefulness and effectiveness. You will discover the power of peer helping. You will learn that the helping process is a two-way street. The satisfaction that you will experience in facilitating and assisting others will add to your own personal growth.

Summary

One important task for peer helpers is helping others learn how to make good decisions. Good decisions result when people apply a systematic approach to problem solving. Five specific tasks in decision making were recommended for peer helping. Good decision makers learn how to: 1) define the problem; 2) investigate alternatives and consequences; 3) make a choice; 4) take action; and 5) evaluate the results.

Four key questions that you can often ask are: What's the problem or situation? What have you done about it? What else could you do? What's your next step?

As a peer helper, you can apply some of the facilitative skills and helping relationship concepts to decision making. In addition, it is time to consider some helping projects that might give you an opportunity to share what you have learned with others.

Activity 7.1

Making Decisions

Purpose:

To practice the skill of decision making by becoming more aware of alternatives and values.

Materials:

None

Procedure:

1. Form groups of three (triads). One person will be the talker while two people work as facilitators.

2. The talker begins by telling of a decision that she or he is trying to make. The facilitators listen carefully, taking turns making high facilitative responses until the problem has been clarified and feelings have received attention.

3. The talker is then asked by one of the facilitators, "And, what are your alternatives?" The talker continues, as the facilitators also continue to take turns making high facilitative responses and encouraging the person to think of consequences (e.g. "What would happen if you did that?").

4. Next, the talker is asked by one of the facilitators, "Of all the alternatives, which one is most appealing to you?" Again the talker continues as the helpers make high facilitative responses.

5. Finally, the talker is asked what he or she is planning to do next. One facilitator summarizes the problem and the related feelings. The other facilitator clarifies the alternative which has been chosen and what the person is planning to do.

6. Members of the triad change roles and the next talker tells of a decision that he or she is trying to make, and so on.

Activity 7.2

The Problem-solving Model

Purpose:

To provide an opportunity to learn and practice a four-step problem solving model and to practice facilitative responses.

Materials:

None

Procedure:

1. List the following four questions on a card, which you can put in front of you. It is a four-step problem-solving model:
   A. What is the problem or situation?
   B. What have you done?
   C. What else could you do?
   D. What is your next step?

2. Divide into triads, with one talker, one observer, and one facilitator. After one round, roles are changed; and, then again in a third round. Thus, all three people are eventually in all three roles.

3. The first talker begins by telling of: 1) A problem that he or she is having; or, 2) A problem that someone else is having and the person is trying to help; or, 3) a decision the person is trying to make.

4. As the talker shares ideas and feelings, the first facilitator uses the key questions to coach the person through a thinking process. High facilita-

tive responses are used in combination with each of the key questions. If time is limited, limit the number of facilitative responses (perhaps any 2 but only 2 to each question).

5. After the four key questions have been posed and the peer helper has responded, the observer stops the interaction and tells what was seen or heard. Were the key questions asked? What effect did they seem to have? How were other facilitative responses used with the four-step model? What did the talker think and feel?

6. Change roles and begin again. Use the same problem-solving model, as the new talker picks a topic.

7. After everyone has had a turn, ask the group to talk about their experiences with the model. In what ways was it helpful to the facilitator? How was it helpful to the talker? How might the model be used with a small group of students who are having a similar problem? (Role play a situation, if time permits.)

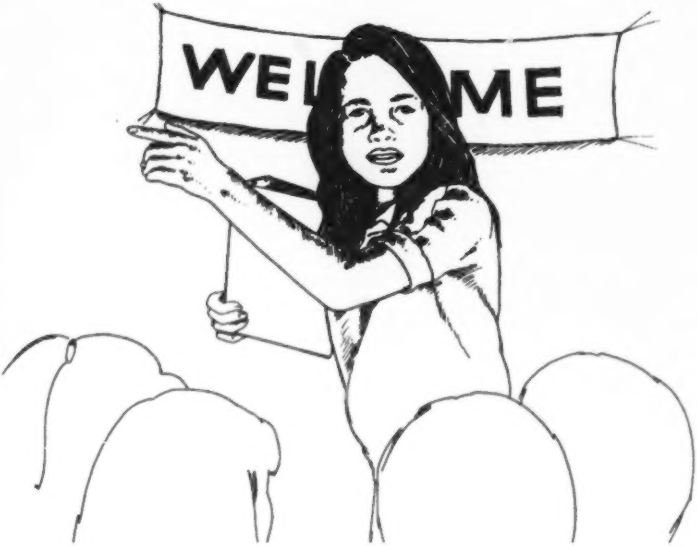
8. Think of some situations in which a peer helper might use the model (e.g. a teacher-student conflict; a boy-girl problem).

Chapter 8

Helping Projects for Peer Helpers

"There is a kind of victory in good work, no matter how humble."

Jack Kemp



Peer helper training had been lots of fun, but Juanita was looking forward to tomorrow. The fifth graders from Littlewood Elementary School would be coming to visit Highview Middle School. Juanita and the other peer helpers would be assisting with the orientation program. She remembered how excited she was when she first visited Highview as a fifth grader. She wanted to do everything she could to make their first visit a positive one.

Peer helper programs provide training in facilitative skills. Careful supervision of organized helping projects is also provided. Peer helpers reach out to people, seizing upon opportunities to work with others whenever occasions arise. They use their training informally to help others in need. Peer helpers also put their skills into practice through organized projects. The projects put peer helpers in situations where they can serve others.

Helping projects are an important part of a peer helper program. First, they give helpers-in-training something to point toward. There is more meaning to their study. They can imagine how one might work in certain situations, making training more purposeful. Second, organized projects enable trainers and helpers to plan for the use of certain skills and systematic interventions. Third, projects usually bring visibility and credibility to peer helper programs. Finally, since the projects are planned around specific goals and objectives, it is easier to evaluate the work of the helpers.

Projects are typically aimed at a specific group or population. They are organized in sequential steps or stages. They take place within a given time. Special events or activities are scheduled. Some projects require more skills than others. Some require more support and supervision.

Most projects are organized around four basic roles: 1) *assistant,* 2) *tutor,* 3) *special friend,* and 4) *small group leader.* The assistant role involves indirect services. Others, such as teachers or counselors, usually take the lead. The peer helper provides support. Tutors, both in and out of schools, can coach and teach. They might focus on academic topics, physical skills, job procedures, or life management skills. A special friend listens and talks with someone. There is a feeling of support and an interest in helping someone to be successful. Finally, small group leaders work in groups where they lead or co-lead discussions. Dividing large groups into smaller peer helper-led groups enables more participants to talk and share ideas.

You might think of some projects that would be possible in your school or community. At first, they might be limited. Then, after some experience, longer projects could be planned. Beginning projects usually require fewer skills and less time. As self-confidence grows and skills are refined through experience and supervision, advanced projects can be developed.

Peer helpers learn at their own individual paces. Some are ready to be involved in more extensive projects sooner than others. Some helpers have a greater sense of what is required of them in certain situations. Some helpers need closer supervision. However, when a project is carefully planned, all trained peer helpers can play important roles.

The following examples are presented to stimulate your thinking. They can be changed to meet your interests and needs. Trainers and helpers often provide their own creative touch through clever names, activities, and procedures.

Suggested Helping Projects

Helping Interviews

As special friends, peer helpers can encourage others to talk about themselves. They can also help them to explore some of the issues that are affecting their lives. This gives them a chance to think about how they might solve their problems. In one middle school, peer helpers were assigned a room in the guidance office. Students could talk to them in individual private meetings. Topics ranged from student-teacher conflicts to improving study habits.

Peer Support Groups

Some people benefit from knowing that they are not alone when facing a particular situation. Peer helpers need not have the same problem as group members. In order to be facilitative, some groups are organized around a common concern or situation. Students who are trying to lose weight or change their eating habits might benefit from peer support. Students who have lost a parent through death or divorce also can benefit from a support group.

Planning Leisure Activities

People of all ages need help deciding on ways to use their leisure time. Middle school students have led groups of younger students. They can help them talk about loneliness. They can think together about time management. They could discuss how to use spare time. One peer group met for ten sessions during the lunch hour to talk about hobbies. Members wanted to learn how to do new things.

Peer Tutoring

In a study center, peer tutors provided academic help in a variety of subject areas. The center had a list of tutors for each subject. Peer tutors met with self- and teacher-referred students. Tutoring ranged from one session to several regularly scheduled meetings during a grading period.

A peer helper might tutor a handicapped person in a certain skill, such as how to manage a wheel chair or cope with an insensitive observer. Coaches can draw upon students who are proficient in some sport. Peers can work with younger students (cross-age tutoring) who need special attention. However, tutoring is not simply a matter of drilling or telling others what to do. Peer helpers use their skills to help the self-doubters, the discouraged, the resistant, and the worriers.

Buddy Systems

When people are new to a situation, they might feel uneasy. They could have a difficult time adjusting. Peer helpers, working through a buddy or special friend project, might make the change easier. For instance, in many schools peer helpers are assigned as "greeters and meeters." They take turns meeting new students. They talk with them about school procedures and welcoming them to the school. They also show them around the building and introduce them to others.

In one school, a "new-student group" met Friday afternoons to talk about their experiences at the school. They asked questions. Peer helpers facilitated discussions. Referrals were made when appropriate. The peer helpers were "buddies" for the grading period, serving as personal resources. The Friday meetings were voluntary and open. When the students no longer needed the group for assistance, they moved onto other groups within the school.

Working with the Handicapped

As part of a friendship club, peer helpers befriended students who were enrolled in an educable mentally handicapped class. The helpers talked with their "buddies." They tutored them in their classroom and went on field trips with them. Similar services have been provided for the hard of hearing, blind, and other physically handicapped students.

Developmental Play Times

Many students who enter kindergarten have not developed their abilities to be good learners. Sometimes they lack social skills. They are unable to listen, follow directions, or cooperate in class activities. Fourth and fifth grade peer helpers have been taught to interact one-to-one with developmentally delayed kindergarten students (Canning, 1985). Fifteen supervised group sessions were arranged. Play activities allowed peer helpers to work with their special friends. Close relationships were formed. Modeling took place and skills were taught.

Large Group Presentations

Peer helpers can organize and take part in large group presentations. They can co-lead classroom activities. Panels, role playing, skits, and demonstrations can help students think about important topics. Some of the topics might be study skills, cheating, stress and test anxiety, preventing suicides, drug abuse, and friendships. First, there is a large group presentation. Then, the large group is divided into smaller discussion groups led by the peer helpers.

Peer helpers can also speak to civic clubs and local groups. They can, with careful preparation, help inform members of community organizations.

Child Safety

Child safety is a topic that is of special interest to parents. They like the idea of peer helpers working with younger children to teach them safety. This may involve common sense behavior around traffic, machines, or common household hazards. In one school, middle school peer helpers worked with first and second grade students. They helped them think of ways to deal with strangers. They role played situations which showed the young children how to determine friendly from hostile situations.

In another middle school, peer helpers developed a puppet show for elementary school students. It was about child abuse. The program was so popular that it was requested by every school principal in the district. It was praised by concerned teachers who followed up the program with more discussions in their classrooms. Child safety can be presented in an upbeat manner, even though it is a serious topic.

Alcohol and Drug Abuse

In one school alcohol and drug abuse seemed to be a problem among students. A three-day unit was prepared by peer helpers. It was then presented in classes by teams of peers. They also organized a drug-free school campaign. It featured banners, slogans, bulletin boards, and dramatic skits.

Parent Education

Older and younger generations need to communicate more often and more effectively. This is particularly true of parents and their children. They need to learn how to resolve differences of opinion. Conflicts need to be reduced. Peer helpers can lead or co-lead small group discussions. They can share ideas by being a member of a panel. Parents and young people can discuss mutual interest. They can talk together about common problems, rules, and expectations.

ESL Rap Groups

English as a second language is a part of many schools. This is true especially in areas where there has been an influx of refugees or immigrants from foreign countries. ESL (English as a Second Language) rap groups give these language and culturally different people a chance to talk about their concerns. They can also practice English in a safe setting. Peer helpers, especially those who are bilingual, can lead support groups. They can help identify special needs. Members of the ESL group can learn basic "success" skills in their community and school.

Prevention of Conflict and Violence

In some cities violence has become a major concern of students and parents. Peer helpers, trained in conflict resolution, might make a difference. They can organize meetings which focus on the prevention of violence. They can identify the special needs in a community or school.

Peer helpers are not police officers, disciplinarians, or persons acting from an authority base. Rather, they try to befriend those who are either the victims or those who tend to be angry. They try to help them to explore other alternatives. Meeting with professional counselors is one solution. They might even be able to help mediate some conflicts, depending on their training.

Sometimes a tragic event takes place in a school or other setting. People want to talk about it. They need time to think about how things happened. They want to sort out what can be done to prevent something similar from taking place in the future. Nature's violence, such as a tornado, can also create conflicts. Peer helpers can talk with classmates and adults in the aftermath of a violent storm.

Summary

Projects enable peer helpers to apply what has been learned in a training program. Each project has specific goals. Some may take specialized training and practice. Most projects have a time frame in which helpers work.

As a part of the on-going supervision of projects, peers may be asked to write about their experiences. Of course, these are private journals. They can also talk with their trainers about the general ideas and issues that result from their projects. Training without a helping project is similar to keeping a good race horse in the barn. The integration of helping skills comes about when training is put into practice through projects.

Activity 8.1

Role Playing

Purpose:

To role play possible responses to problem moments.

Materials:

Paper and pencil; any chairs or props that are appropriate for role playing situations.

Procedure:

1. The class is divided into three groups. Each group writes two problem moments, one for each of the other two groups.

2. Each team then takes the two new problem moments and discusses among themselves how they will act out the problem. A "script" may be written which presents the key issues involved.

3. Each team, in turn, role plays or acts out the problem moment. Allow about two to three minutes for each situation.

4. Discussion follows regarding a) effectiveness, and b) alternatives.

Activity 8.2

A Cry for Help

Purpose:

To examine some problem moments that other facilitators have had; to explore alternatives.

Materials:

The following problem moments, paper, pencil/pen.

Procedure:

1. Read a problem moment from the following list. Imagine what you would do if you were in this situation.
2. Write a response that illustrates what you might do first, then next and so on. If it is a response, then put quotation marks around your words.
3. Get in a small group. Someone volunteers to read a problem moment aloud. Then each person in the group tells what they would do. Be sure to read or say your response aloud.

Problem Moments:

1. Jonathan says that some boys have been teasing him. He tried to ignore them and to laugh it off, but the taunting has become more hostile. The insults are more painful. He says: "Tonight, they are going to get me again. I don't know what to do. They just keep picking and picking at me. The worst part is that nobody seems to care what they say about me. I'm all alone and everyone thinks it's funny." Tears come to his eyes and he turns his face away from you. He is about to cry. What do you do now?

2. Martha has been working with you and reports that her school work is improving. She still has one teacher who remembers her troubles in the past. Martha thinks the teacher is holding the past against her. She says that she has tried everything, but nothing is working.

3. Eduardo says he doesn't say much in class. He is unsure about his English. The last few times he tried, he mispronounced some words and some other students laughed. He has since decided that the best thing to do is to be silent. His teachers say that he has a bad attitude. He will fail unless he participates more in class.

4. Tina seems to be more concerned about what the boys think of her than what teachers think. "You're too boy crazy," says one of her teachers. She likes to draw attention to herself by making crude and sexy remarks. Tina could be a better student, but she spends a lot of time thinking about how she looks. She wants to impress boys. Tina needs to pay more attention to her studies and homework.

5. Lee was caught stealing a six pack of beer at one of the neighborhood stores. His father is furious. He has threatened to punish Lee, saying that the boy has embarrassed the family. Lee says that he will run away.

Activity 8.3

Role Reversal

Purpose:

To practice listening and making facilitative responses. To learn about the thoughts and feelings of the opposite sex. To become more aware of others.

Materials:

Chairs are arranged in two circles. There is an inner and an outer circle.

Procedure:

1. Form two circles—one inside the other.

2. All the boys sit in the inside circle Girls sit in the outside chairs.

3. As the girls listen (no comments), the boys talk about:
   a. What do you think it would be like to be a girl?
   b. What are the advantages?
   c. What are the disadvantages?
   d. The problems?

4. After eight to ten minutes, the girls' group responds with at least:
   a. Four clarifying responses
   b. Four feeling responses
   c. Two questions
   d. One piece of advice or interpretation

The girls' responses should be related directly to what the boys have said.

5. Now, change places—the girls on the inside and the boys on the outside.

6. Repeat the same procedures as above (3). However, this time the boys listen (without comment) while the girls discuss what it would be like to be a boy.

7. The boys then respond, as outlined in (4).

8. Use the remainder of the time for open discussion.

"The human mind, once stretched to a new idea, never goes back to its original dimensions."

Oliver Wendell
Holmes

Postscript

If you have completed a training program for peer helpers in the middle school, congratulations!. The ideas and skills that you learned will prove to be useful in many life situations. Think of ways you can use your knowledge and facilitative skills. Who needs help? What can you do? Good luck in your work.

Related Programs

Elementary School

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Middle School

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High School

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Sorenson, D.L. (1992). *Conflict resolution and mediation for peer helpers.* Minneapolis, MN: Educational Media Corporation.

Teachers

Wittmer, J. & Myrick, R.D. (1989). *The teacher as facilitator.* Minneapolis, MN: Educational Media Corporation.

Code of Ethics for Peer Helpers
National Peer Helpers Association
June, 1990

Peer Helpers shall be people of personal integrity. As a minimum, the NPHA believes the peer helpers Code of Ethics shall contain the following and be evidenced by a commitment to and pursuit of:

1. A philosophy which upholds peer helping as an effective way to address the needs and conditions of people.
2. The individual's right to dignity, self-development, and self-direction.
3. Supervision and support from professional staff while involved in the program.
4. The development of a nurturing personality which:
    - Reflects a positive role model and healthy lifestyle (i.e., development and observation of a set of norms which guide behavior while in the program).
    - Rejects the pursuit of personal power, elitist status, or gain at the expense of others.
    - Strives to exemplify the peer helping philosophy in all life situations.
5. Maintenance of confidentiality of information imparted during the course of program-related activities. While confidentiality is the norm, certain exceptions shall be referred immediately to the professional staff. These exceptions include the following:
    - Situations involving real or potential danger to the safety or well-being of the peer helper, helpee, or others.
    - Child abuse, sexual abuse, and other situations involving legal requirements of disclosure.
    - Severe family dysfunction, psychotic behavior, extreme drug or alcohol abuse, and any other problems beyond the experience and expertise of the peer helper.
6. Personal Safety. Peer helpers must recognize, report, and know techniques to deal with potential threats to their emotional or physical well-being.

HELPING SKILLS
for Middle School Students

by Robert D . Myrick, Ph.D.

and Don L. Sorenson, Ph.D.

Middle school students who serve in a variety of helping roles should receive special training in interpersonal and communication skills. These peer facilitators are trained to help others to think about their feelings and ideas, to explore alternatives, and to make responsible decisions. *Helping Skills for Middle School Students* presents a developmental model for peer helping which places less emphasis on students in crises and more emphasis on helping them in advance of serious problems.

Students undergoing the training in this book will learn the four parts of the facilitative model: 1) Relating, 2) Listening, 3) Responding, and 4) Decision Making. Training activities are provided for each chapter. Projects for utilizing the skills of the trained helpers are also suggested.

A program leader's guide, *Teaching Helping Skills to Middle School Students*, also is available from Educational Media Corporation®. Additional training activities and suggestions for organizing, administrating, and evaluating this middle school peer helper program are provided in the leader's guide.

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